

## **'Our country has waited too long for justice': Religious leaders throw their support behind Indigenous Voice to Parliament**

Leaders from key Australian religious groups have demanded immediate action on the Indigenous Voice to Parliament.

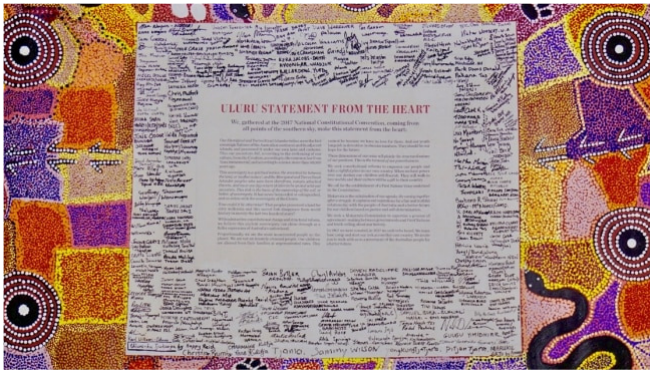
**Tyrone Clarke, *Sky News*, 27 May 2022**

The Indigenous Voice to Parliament has received overwhelming support from the faith community with religious leaders demanding action on the representative body.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese pushed the issue to the centre of his government's agenda when he declared on election night there would be a referendum in his first term.

Mr Albanese reiterated the priority again in his first press conference after he was sworn in as Prime Minister on Monday.

"We will, of course, be advancing the need to have constitutional recognition of First Nations people, including a Voice to Parliament that is enshrined in that constitution," he said.



*The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation to the Australian people*

Faith leaders have now joined the call with representatives from more almost ten religious organisations demanding action on the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The joint resolution – signed by the leaders – declares bipartisan support and action on a referendum was "necessary, right and reasonable".

"There have been many processes and much work completed, the one thing left to do is to let the Australian people have their say," it says.

"There can be no more delay, our country has wanted and waited too long for justice.

"Indigenous Australians must be now afforded in their rightful place in the Australian constitution."



*Keynote speaker and Indigenous filmmaker Rachel Perkins said the event was an “unprecedented moment”. Picture: Supplied*

The Voice to Parliament was a key element of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart and called for an elected Indigenous advisory body to the Federal Parliament.

The proposed body would advise the government on issues affecting First Nations people.

A meeting of Indigenous leaders in April identified two possible dates for a referendum next year including May 27 – which would be the 56th anniversary of the 1967 referendum – or January 27 – 236 years and one day after the formation of the British colony in Sydney.

The gathering of religious leaders in Barangaroo on Friday marks the 55th anniversary of the referendum and five years since the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

Keynote speaker and Indigenous filmmaker Rachel Perkins said the event was an “unprecedented moment... of great national significance”.



*Faith leaders have now joined the call with representatives from more almost ten religious organisations demanding action on the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Picture: Supplied*

“There has never been such a gathering of religious groups who have supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” she said.

“These include the Anglican Church of Australia, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, the Australian National Imams Council, the Australian Sangha Association, the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, the Hindu Council of Australia, the National Council

of Churches in Australia, the National Sikh Council of Australia and the Uniting church in Australian assembly.”

Ms Perkins is the daughter of civil rights activist Charles Perkins who - in the 1960s - drew attention to the state of health, education and housing for Indigenous people by touring on a bus around New South Wales.

Mr Perkins led a group of about 30 students around the towns including Walgett, Moree, Kempsey where they exposed discrimination in the use of public facilities such as swimming pools, picture theatres and hotels.

Dubbed “The Freedom Ride” it was recognised as one of the country’s biggest civil rights events to take place.

In 1966 he became the first Indigenous man to graduate from university in the country. The Charles Perkins Centre at the University of Sydney was named in his honour, and it seeks to “share his philosophy of collaboration, inclusivity and continuing to challenge the status quo”.

He was also appointed to roles at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Hostels

Ms Perkins echoed the words of incoming Indigenous affairs minister Linda Burney who said the referendum could only be achieved through “building consensus” across the aisle.

“We have learned the lesson from history, from our most successful referendum ever that it takes people from all walks of life, all religions, all ages, genders, professions, and importantly, in this moment, all political persuasions to move our nation forward to successful referendum,” Ms Perkins said.

“We ask for a voice in our own affairs, an Indigenous grassroots advisory body guaranteed by the founding document of this modern nation.

“Not a veto, just a voice. Non-binding, but a constitutional promise that Indigenous people will always be heard that though our advice may not always be heeded, we will always have a place at the table in this - our own country. This is a practical solution. Not mere symbolism.”