



I have a Dream

In the Voice.

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There comes a moment in the life of every nation when a document is presented to the populace that offers a new future for that country and its citizens. These types of documents are designed to give expression to a new vision. They are designed to reject the status quo of the past when hope was continually assaulted and defeated by failed political ideologies.

The purpose of the Statement from the Heart is to give our people and all of Australia's citizens a new hope. A new vision. It inspires us all to reach forward into an unfamiliar yet preferred future, beyond the contemporary crises and traumatic predicaments, to clutch the hand of a new dream.

The Statement from the Heart gives me freedom to dream of a better future for my people.

The Statement for the Heart reminds me of other nations who have written similar documents for their citizens, such as:

- The USA's Declaration of Independence.
- England's Magna Carta.
- The UN Declaration of Human Rights.
- A papal encyclical like *Laudato Si'*.
- As an Indigenous theologian, I must also include the Bible as a statement from God's heart—freed from colonial ideologies.
- The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was inspired and designed by the world's Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples but embraced by most the world's nation states.

The UNDRIP, although aspirational, shapes the practical tasks and responsibilities that nation states and institutions have in relation to Indigenous nations who have suffered dispossession for far too long. The UNDRIP shows how Indigenous nations and institutions can work together with colonial governments in good honourable ways that can bring about better working relationships and better-quality outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

These documents are not designed to solve all the world's problems and challenges. But they help to pull away the scales of indifference and doubt from blind eyes and promote instead a newfound faith, vision, and desire for a better world for all. Despite the weaknesses of our own humanness, and our crippling fears inherited from the past, we can strive forward toward this new future with open arms.

The Statement from the Heart gives me freedom to dream of a better future for all peoples in my country.

Yes, we know we are working with fragile tools to repair a world of chaos, pain, indifference, and trauma. It is seemingly impossible to dream about this new future when confronted with these ever-present realities. But the Statement from the Heart is not a self-centred grab for power. It is actually full of grace. It is a gift from the heart of our People!

While the Uluru Statement from the Heart is not a religious or scriptural document, it does reflect the aspirations, values, and principles of Indigenous Australian's spirituality. It does speak about spiritual sovereignties. If anyone is seeking a scripture or passage that resonates with the spirit of reconciliation, justice, truth and unity, you may consider the following verses from the New Testament:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." - Matthew 5:9

"Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." - Romans 14:19

These passages highlight the need to work towards justice, peace, and reconciliation. It is important to note that the Uluru Statement from the Heart itself does not directly reference any specific religious text, yet it can encompass the teachings and creeds of every new religion that now resides in my country. As an Indigenous theologian, I cite from the New Testament, which are a collection of statements and documents written by Jewish followers of Jesus as they reflected on the sovereignty of God over against the political claims of the Roman Empire.

My old people used to ask this question, ***"who gave the British permission to invade our country? Who gave them permission to treat us as if we weren't even an animal or a dog?"*** The brutality of the ways in which the colonizers treated us is etched deep in the memory of our ancestors and in our people's minds today. To put the question in another way, ***"What crime did we commit that would cause another people group to treat us with such astounding cruelty and injustice?"***

And the consequences endure till today: dispossessions, genocide, overrepresentation in jails and hospitalisation, homelessness, transgenerational traumas. Are we to live forever on the margins of society in our own lands with all of these obtrusive horrors? Such questions continue to demand a response! A priceless proposal has come from our Indigenous Australians in The Statement from The Heart, but can the whole nation now respond?

The Statement from the Heart gives me freedom to see beyond past transgressions and to dream and act for a better future for my people and my country.

Yet, how do we reconcile as a nation of many cultures and peoples? I am reminded of a politician from South Australia, King O'Malley, who said this about my people on 23 April 1902: ***"There is no scientific evidence that he (the Aborigine) is a human being at all!"*** Or alternatively, if human, others decided that our people were incapable of government, or of looking after the country. We know that all these perceptions and prejudices were false, yet they are still prevalent throughout Australia today.

The Statement from the Heart invites all Australians to consider their position and their history in my country. This document asks the question of all who have come to live in a country that has been stolen from its original owners. How do we try to reconcile all the competing stories and communities, which have never been successfully federated?

We must all hold these truths to be self-evident: that all individuals are endowed by their Creator with human dignity, that if the political bonds that have connected us one with another are historically unjust, then they must be constituted anew, that certain inalienable rights need to be respected in the Federal Constitution and recognized and supported by all citizens of Australia.

The Statement from the Heart is making three simple requests:

1. An advisory Voice to Parliament, which represents the First Nations and cannot be arbitrarily removed by Government.
2. A treaty that ends an ideological war still currently enshrined in the federal Constitution.
3. A process in which the truth of what happened in this country can be exposed for all to see, so that the truth can set us free and bring true healing, justice and restoration.

I have a dream that we can all dream together!