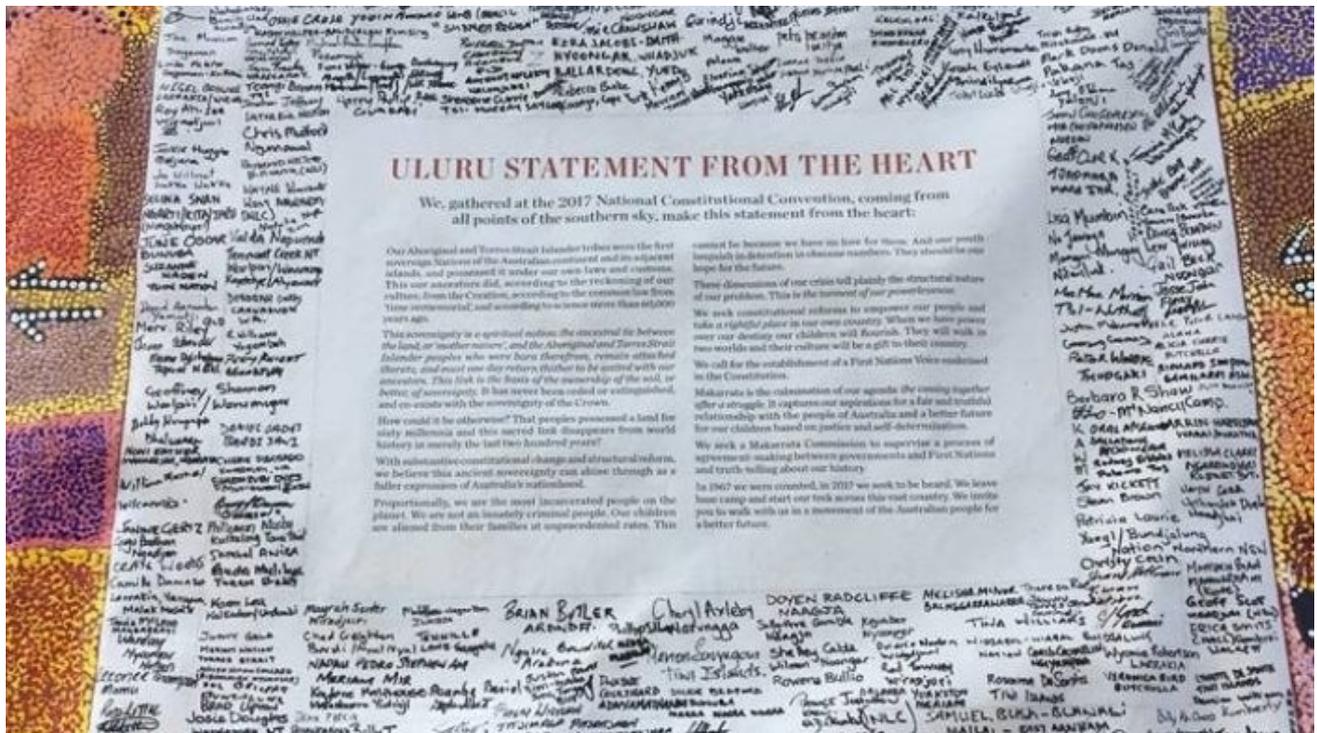


Religious leaders support constitutional referendum on Indigenous voice to parliament

By Paige Cockburn
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Today marks the fifth anniversary of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. (ABC News)

Australian religious leaders gathered at Sydney's Barangaroo today to demand an urgent referendum.

Key points:

- Religious leaders from nine faith groups signed a resolution demanding action
- The signing marks the 55th anniversary of the 1967 referendum to include First Nations people in the constitution
- Anthony Albanese's new federal government has promised to action the statement but has not given a timeline

The faith leaders have now all formally endorsed the Uluru Statement from the Heart, which calls for a "voice" — a representative body that can help shape policy directed at First Nations people — to be enshrined in Australia's constitution.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese made a commitment at last weekend's election for a referendum on the Uluru Statement.

Indigenous groups are now calling for a timeline on when exactly it could be held but new Indigenous Affairs Minister Linda Burney says it won't be called unless the government is sure the Australian people will pass it.

Today's gathering of leaders from nine diverse faiths shows Australia has a growing consensus on the issue, keynote speaker and Indigenous filmmaker Rachel Perkins said.

"What a lineup," she said. "It is an unprecedented moment today of great national significance I believe.

"I urge us all to follow the example of these religious organisations ... let us put our differences aside and work together towards a successful referendum."



Representatives from nine diverse faiths signed the statement in support of the referendum.(ABC News)

During the event, officials from each religion signed a joint resolution demanding bipartisan action on the referendum, noting it is "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," the resolution states.

"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."

Today is the fifth anniversary of the Uluru Statement of the Heart and the 55th anniversary of the 1967 referendum where Australia voted to change the constitution so that all Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people would be counted as part of the population.

The Uluru Statement, which has received backing from a wide range of entities including mining companies and sports teams, was dismissed by the Turnbull government upon its release in 2017.

However, religious leaders say the new Labor government has given them a renewed sense of hope.

Bhante Sujato, who signed the resolution on behalf of the Australian Buddhist community, said now was the time to build a "better democracy".



Buddhist monk Bhante Sujato is a member of the Australian Sangha Association. *(ABC News: Cecilia Connell)*

"Sometimes people from the outside think that all of these religions are so different, but the people within it don't really see those differences as so important," he said.

"For us, what matters is compassion, empathy and humanity.

"We've got to create a broad consensus among the political class as we have already among the religious leaders."

Imam Ibrahim Dadoun said an Indigenous voice in the constitution had been an "important talking point" within the Muslim community throughout the recent election.



Imam Ibrahim Dadoun spoke on behalf of the Australian National Imams Council. (ABC News: Cecilia Connell)

"We say it's very important as it's part of the healing process in regards to coming to terms with what happened with the Aboriginal community [since] 1770," he said.

For Jewish man Henry Pinski, who is a foundation donor of the Radical Reform Lab, the referendum is something close to his heart due to his own family's dispossession.

"I come from a Jewish family impacted by the Holocaust ... it has played a significant role in my upbringing and plays a significant role in the way I see issues," he said.

"So, for us, a commitment to an Indigenous voice in the constitution is something to us that's very simply to understand [and] very meaningful."

Source: [/www.abc.net.au/](http://www.abc.net.au/)