

# Makarrata the map to reconciliation: over to you, leaders

- GALARRWUY YUNUPINGU
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We have come to a time in our nation's history when the Australian people have an opportunity to decide whether or not to deal with the relationship between my people and those that came after us and changed our way of life. Either a real process of settlement, or makarrata, will now start, or the nation will turn its back on these issues, leaving these challenges for the next generation.

The starting point for this makarrata process was arrived at by the Aboriginal leadership at Uluru and is given voice in the Uluru Statement. The Uluru Statement has now set out the issues for assessment. As it should, the statement goes further than constitutional recognition and takes us into the heart of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the nation. This gives us a process where we can now get serious and look to a proper settlement. All of us, as Australians, are part of this process.

The principles of makarrata have guided Yolngu people in North East Arnhem Land through difficult disputes for centuries and they are useful as a guide to the current challenge.

First, the disputing parties must be brought together. Then, each party, led by their elders, must speak carefully and calmly about the dispute. They must put the facts on the table and air their grievances. If a person speaks wildly, or out of turn, he or she is sent away and shall not be included any further in the process. Those who come for vengeance, or for other purposes, will also be sent away, for they can only disrupt the process.

The leaders must always seek a full understanding of the dispute: what lies behind it; who is responsible; what each party wants, and all things that are normal to peacemaking efforts. When that understanding is arrived at, then a settlement can be agreed upon. This settlement is also a symbolic reckoning — an action that says to the world that from now on and forever the dispute is settled; that the dispute no longer exists, it is finished. And from the honesty of the process and the submission of both parties to finding the truth, then the dispute is ended. In past times a leader came forward and accepted a punishment and this leader once punished was then immediately taken into the heart of the aggrieved clan. The leader's wounds were healed by the men and women of the aggrieved clan, and the leader was given gifts and shown respect — and this former foe, who had caused pain and suffering to people, would live with those that had been harmed and the peace was made — not just for them but for future generations.

In this way the parties were able to come together, to trade, to marry, to work together and make their lives together. The dispute was over and peace and harmony were achieved.

The same thing is happening now. We know we are a part of this nation — we want to be a part of this nation — but we want to have our grievances settled in a calm and proper way. We want our wounds healed, our injuries tended to and to be given an equal shot at the prosperity of this nation. We want unity and togetherness — a shared future.

This is the work of the Referendum Council and all the delegates who came together at Uluru.

The words that have come out of Uluru are truthful as is required by makarrata and so the process has now started. The aggrieved party has just called the other to come forward and meet with it. And like in the old days when the elders would send a gift of cycad bread to the other group to request the meeting in a peaceful way, so too is the final Referendum Council report a sign of friendship.

Now, in the spirit of makarrata Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have invited the Prime Minister to Gulkula to meet with us. The Prime Minister, should he come, will be treated with the greatest of respect, for he is Her Majesty's elected representative, and the leader of the Australian people. He is the right person to come and the right person to treat with us. He and the Leader of the Opposition are the right people to work with us, along with, in time, the leaders of each of the states and territories.

There is a difficult task here. It is the same issue that was faced by my father, by old man Birrikitji, his brother Buwatpuy, and the others when they stood on the sand at Birany Birany and sought to make the peace between disputing clans. They were all hard men, peacekeepers, and peacemakers. They agreed the words that made the peace. They agreed to the form of the settlement. What they agreed was then put forward and was accepted. Our task is much greater, and much more complicated, but, as I see it, the principles are the same.

The words from Uluru are clear, but they are a position from one party, not the final settlement. What I see as required now is the true partnership of the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition to take the settlement process forward and to a conclusion. We have before us a simple proposal that can be understood by all Australians — with genuine leadership, we can make it a reality.

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