



Refugee Communities  
Advocacy Network (RCAN),  
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To:  
Voice Secretariat  
Reply Paid 83380  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

NSW Refugee Communities Advocacy Network (RCAN) is led and driven by refugees, former refugees, people seeking asylum and people with refugee lived experiences. RCAN represents and advocates on behalf of refugee communities in NSW.

RCAN supports the Uluru Statement in its entirety. The majority of our members arrived in Australia as refugees. However, we feel that it is our duty and responsibility as Australians to participate in this important conversation and express our solidarity with and support for the Australian First Nations Peoples.

First Nations Peoples have a special relationship with the land. That relationship confers sovereignty. First Nations Peoples have never ceded that sovereignty. We are on stolen land. First Nations Peoples are waiting patiently for the day when "mainstream" Australia wakes up to that reality and give back what it does not own. That time is NOW! First Nations have been calling for a Treaty for many years and we feel that without a Treaty, Australia will continue to exist on the myth of "Terra Nullius".

Many RCAN members, although do not claim full understanding of the dispossession of the First Nations Peoples, come from countries where their indigeneity to those countries and regions of the world was the basis on which they were persecuted and exiled. Although their experiences are different, communities with refugee backgrounds in Australia do understand what it means to have land stolen and to experience cultural and social genocide. Many of our members have firsthand experience of state terrorism and our communities have suffered colonial terrorism. We have known the societal impact of terrorism and genocide, community pain and powerlessness, fragmentation, disempowerment and breakdown in relationships. We also know the ongoing struggle of intergenerational trauma, the suffering that spans generations. While the experience of Australian First Nations Peoples is unique, we feel that our experience enhances our empathy and commitment to stand in solidarity.

RCAN supports the call for a Makarrata Commission that would facilitate truth-telling. Reconciliation can only begin to happen when Mainstream Australia begins to acknowledge First Nations Peoples' sovereignty over this land we now call home. Wrongs committed in the past against First Nations Peoples must be acknowledged

to correct history. Truth has to be shared and accepted to create a whole of society change. There are no by-standers, we all must support and participate in this change! Some of our members have had experience with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) in Rwanda, Liberia, Sierra Leone and South Africa. We know that similar Commission was held in Canada to support truth-telling and pursue justice for Canada's First Nations. There are many lessons learned from the lived experience of such Commissions and we are happy to share our lived experience.

The Makarrata Commission will allow First Nations Peoples to speak their truth as painful as that might be. Such a process should address the consequences of colonisation and dispossession which continue to be felt today. All of Australian society must come to terms with this truth and seek change. If we are not a part of the solution, we are a part of the problem. First Nations Peoples should have their rightful place in Australia which rests on sovereignty, Voice, Treaty and Truth. These elements are essential to the healing journey and no amount of service provision and projects managed by well-meaning bureaucrats can replace them.

The least Australia can do right now is to enshrine the voice of First Nations Peoples in the Australian constitution so that First Nations Peoples have the right to not only advise the government on issues related to them but also about all issues of concern to Australia. The First Nations Peoples voice should be the conscience and spiritual voice of parliament while exercising their right to self-determination. That voice should be considered in all decisions that parliament takes.

The nature of how that voice looks is a matter for First Nations Peoples to determine.

### **List of readings for your reference**

<https://healingfoundation.org.au/intergenerational-trauma/>

<https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/ctg-rs21.pdf>

<http://www3.brandonu.ca/cjns/27.2/03knopf.pdf>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2158244013499143>

<https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1522&context=lcp>

<https://theconversation.com/do-truth-and-reconciliation-commissions-heal-divided-nations-109925>

<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/resources/sr130.pdf>