



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA
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Uniting Church WA calls for a First Nations' Voice in Australia's Constitution

At its 43rd Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA, held over the weekend, the Uniting Church WA agreed to support the 2017 *Statement from the Heart*, and urges the Commonwealth Government to listen to it and establish a First Nations' Voice in the Constitution, and the Makarrata Commission – to supervise a process of agreement making between governments and First Nations, and provide a means for truth-telling about the history of Australia's First Peoples.

The Uniting Church WA also urges the West Australian State Government to establish an independent commission to advance the development of treaty-making with West Australian Aboriginal Nations. It recommends to follow the model begun in Victoria for developing State-based treaties. The Victorian Treaty Advancement Commission is currently establishing an Aboriginal Representative Body and an ongoing strategy for future treaty negotiations, which is expected to be complete by the end of 2019.

"It would be a huge step forward to see the WA Government commit to developing state-based treaties with our people. To be truly treated as equal sovereign entities in treaty negotiations would be a powerful development," said Rev Robert Jetta, Chair of the Western Australian Regional Committee of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

"There are plenty of issues facing our people and plenty of positive-sounding initiatives from Government, but let's not delay on the main thing, which is treaty."

The *Statement from the Heart* was made by the First Nations' National Constitutional Convention at Uluru as a consensus position of 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across Australia as the preferred pathway towards reconciliation.

A constitutionally enshrined First Peoples' Voice will allow a greater say in policy and legislation governing their affairs and, in so doing, improve autonomy and prosperity of Australia's First Peoples.

The Uniting Church WA has listened to the *Statement from the Heart* and seeks to further its call towards a reconciled future between First and Second peoples.

"The Uniting Church WA is committed to reconciliation between Australia's First and Second peoples," said Rev Steve Francis, Moderator of the Uniting Church WA.

"A voice in the Constitution will mean First Peoples can have more say in the issues which affect them and their communities. We need to listen to Australia's First People and acknowledge that this is the way forward.

"It's time for Australia to make this important step on the journey towards reconciliation, and for Indigenous Australians to have a voice in this nation's Constitution."

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For media enquiries and interviews, please contact Media and Communications Manager, Maggie Johns on 0419 831 576