



MEDIA RELEASE

Recognise our culture. It has not diminished.

Statement from William Tilmouth, Arrernte leader and Chair of Children's Ground

On January 26, 1788, our land was occupied and taken by force by foreign interests. If the same thing happened today, it would be seen as a wrongful occupation of a sovereign country. It would be regarded as an act of war.

For more than 235 years we have been pushed to the brink of annihilation through assimilation, removal and displacement. We have suffered land theft, stolen children, cultural eradication and widespread oppression.

This history - and the current day experience of First Nations people - is painful.

We can celebrate Australia and our rich country and diversity on any other day of the year. But on this day, we ask all Australians to reflect, learn, and heal with us.

Despite colonisation, dispossession, and attempts to erase us, our stories, languages, and traditions remain a force of resilience. Culture has been, and continues to be a protective factor, healing and strengthening us. On January 26 we feel our survival, connection, and the unbreakable bond between our people and our Country.

We can only move forward when we acknowledge the truth of our past and together commit to dismantling ongoing injustices.

We have the ability to change the status quo. It must be led by people, not by politics. Change is about backing the leadership, voices and solutions of local, First Nations communities and creating opportunities for our people to access education, employment and healthcare that prioritises culture and our way of life.

Together we can create a new reality. We can create a history for our children and grandchildren, so when they look back, they can celebrate that their culture was respected, they lived with freedom and opportunity, free from racism and walked in partnership with non-First Nations people.

In 2009 Australia endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), a global framework of minimum standards for the rights of Indigenous peoples. The declaration states that First Nations people have a right to speak their languages, maintain their culture and a right to raise and educate their children in their traditional ways. The Australian government has endorsed, and is accountable to this internationally recognised right, yet they are failing to implement and uphold these standards.

We call on the government to recognise January 26 as a day that brought great harm to our people and to implement UNDRIP into law, policy, and practice.

We invite all Australians to understand the truth of our history as a Nation. To learn and grow together so that we can achieve justice, dignity and human rights for all people living on these sacred lands.

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