



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

January 26 marks invasion but our strength, our unity and our leadership determine what comes next

Statement from William Tilmouth, Arrernte leader, founding chair of Children's Ground and recipient of the 2025 Human Rights Medal.

History lives through us all. January 26 marks invasion. It marks dispossession, violence and the loss of our lands, our cultures and our lives. I grieve that day. For our people, January 26 will always be Invasion Day. A day where dignity, respect and freedoms for our people were destroyed. This should be a time for us to stand together in our history, not in blame, but to understand and heal.

Sadly, I don't expect January 26 to change any time soon. There is no political will to confront what this date means for First Nations people. That is the truth we are living with.

What began with invasion continues today through systems that control, exclude and harm First Nations people. Governments fail to recognise the treatment of our people as a human rights crisis. Short term measures and political rhetoric continue while systemic violence carries on.

It is up to us as First Peoples to lead our own future. We cannot wait for others to do what we are capable of ourselves. Self-determination and owning our agency means making decisions for our children, our communities and our lives, on our terms and for our future.

History is not going to change, but how we respond to it shapes what comes next. This is the challenge and opportunity for all Australians. In an ever-changing world, politically and environmentally, standing together matters. Not as individuals competing. Not as them and us. But as people recognising shared responsibility for the future.

When we act together, we are stronger. Unity strengthens us.

Our strength comes from Country. From learning how to live with Country. From culture. From surviving. These are strengths we have carried for generations, and they matter not only for First Nations people, but for this country as a whole. Our old people say babies born on this country are part of this country, it doesn't matter who that baby is. Whether you are First Nations or you have come to country, all of us become part of Country.

Children's Ground is an example of collective strength. We lead through a First Nations governance that is about protecting ourselves collectively and building together. It is about our people exercising their rights. Not to be separate but to be strategically autonomous. Creating an

environment where we can lead the systems our children need, grounded in culture, responsibility and care for each other.

So much was stolen on January 26. We have been robbed of ourselves. But our roots are not broken and our culture and law remain. Rebuilding our strength takes time, unity and action. We invite the support and care of all Australians, because our strength, survival and culture sit at the heart of this country and strengthen all of us.

January 26 will always be a day of grief for our people. But it is also a reminder that we cannot wait for permission to act. Our future depends on what we choose to do now, together.

We are all connected. To this land, to each other and to the future we are shaping.

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Children's Ground has developed a dedicated January 26 online resource that shares community voices, history and lived experience from Central Australia and the Top End. The website traces the impacts of invasion and the ways communities have responded by placing children, culture and self-determination at the centre of rebuilding futures. Created ahead of January 26, the resource supports learning and reflection while helping reduce the cultural load carried by First Nations people on the day itself.

View the resource at january26.au