

UPSWELLING OF SUPPORT

On 14 October 2023, Australians made a historic decision at the polls. They were faced with a crucial choice - to embrace a future where the Constitution acknowledged and honoured the First Peoples of Australia through the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Despite the hopes and dreams riding on this momentous occasion, the outcome did not sway in favour of this transformative change.

Last Wednesday (22 May) we were privileged to have Fr Frank Brennan SJ unpack the topic: "Where to from No?" In his reflections on the aftermath of the referendum, he noted it was crucial to empathise with the profound disappointment expressed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The open letter written by First Nations leaders, following a week's silence post referendum, underscored the deep sense of rejection and disbelief at the lack of recognition for the continent's first peoples and their enduring connection to the land.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are in shock and are grieving the result. We feel acutely the repudiation of our peoples and the rejection of our efforts to pursue reconciliation in good faith. That people who came to our country in only the last 235 years would reject the recognition of this continent's First Peoples – on our sacred land which we have cared for and nurtured for more than 65,000 years – is so appalling and mean-spirited as to be utterly unbelievable a week following. It will remain unbelievable and appalling for decades to come (<https://ulurustatement.org/statement-for-our-people-and-country/>).

Brennan noted that learning from past experiences, the journey towards constitutional reform presents a critical juncture. The Indigenous community's voices and aspirations must guide this process, fostering a collective commitment to justice and unity. Despite the challenges ahead, the Indigenous leaders' unwavering faith offers a beacon of hope for a more inclusive and equitable future:

We have faith that the upswelling of support through this

Referendum has ignited a fire for many to walk with us on our journey towards justice. Our truths have been silenced for too long.

Brennan, recounting the words of Noel Pearson Boyer Lecture (2022) where he stated:

A bridge to join all Australians in common cause, to work together in partnership to make a new settlement that celebrates the rightful place of Indigenous heritage in Australia's national identity. A constitutional bridge to create an ongoing dialogue between the First Peoples and Australian governments and parliaments, to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (<https://iview.abc.net.au/show/boyer-lecture-2022-noel-pearson>),

Noel Pearson's speech reiterated the concept of a constitutional bridge as a valuable analogy when contemplating the Indigenous voice to Parliament, as explored in Brennan's book titled "An Indigenous Voice to Parliament, Considering a Constitutional Bridge" and subsequent new release, "Lessons from Our Failure to Build a Constitutional Bridge in the 2023 Referendum".

Brennan's commitment and long-standing support for reconciliation was on display as he opened us all up to the fundamental truth that there is a shared hope for reconciliation and progress through meaningful dialogue and engagement and that this bridge can be created, but it needs all of us to work and walk together to build it from the ground up.



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REFLECTION:

How will you provide an 'upswelling of support' and facilitate meaningful dialogue and engagement with your local Indigenous communities?

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live. We support the Uluru Statement from the Heart.