

Media Statement
October 17, 2014

NGOs: clear path to a referendum held no later than 2016 is needed, racial non-discrimination must stay

A group of leading NGOs have called for a renewed sense of urgency to move towards a referendum to recognise the First Australians in our Constitution.

The group, which coordinates a constitutional recognition network of 40 non-government organisations, called for a much clearer pathway to a referendum that should be held at or before the 2016 Federal Election.

The organisations said that the nation now has an historic opportunity to finally recognise the First Australians in the nation's founding document and remove discrimination. They said that, provided Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people support the final proposal, the nation must take this opportunity earlier rather than later.

Among their calls was for an enhanced public awareness campaign that would support moving towards holding the referendum in the next two years.

The group said that the referendum should not be put off any longer than is necessary to finalise a proposal, raise awareness, and garner support for a successful referendum.

The group also emphasised its unwavering support for including racial non-discrimination in any proposal, and the importance of the Expert Panel recommendations forming the basis for finalising a proposal.

They emphasised that the Expert Panel conducted 250 consultations around the country and received 3500 submissions and stated that recommendations based on such extensive consultation, and unanimously supported by a diverse Panel, must be a central part of deliberations on finalising a model for discussion.

The group was clear that change must be substantive and must address racial non-discrimination unless otherwise agreed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The group agreed with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples call for the Australian Government to establish a clear process towards meaningful recognition and noted the central role that the national representative body should have in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the final proposal to ensure it accorded with their wishes.

The group commended political parties for maintaining bipartisanship, and was positive about the prospects for finalising a proposal supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that would succeed at a referendum.

ANTaR
Oxfam Australia
Fred Hollows Foundation

Uniting Church in Australia Assembly
ACOSS
Reconciliation Australia

Media Inquiries: media@antar.org.au