

Submission in support of the Uluru voice from the heart

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the country, where I am sitting as I write these words, the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

I am not from Australia. I discovered a land of extremes. Australia has taught me to respect its land and all its inhabitants. It has taught me to adjust my perspective on the elements I took for granted. The land burns regularly. Floods threaten to wash away homes periodically. Its animals could mean our death frequently. Everyone seems to be surprised when this happens. Everyone still believes we can bend the elements to our will or kill them to remove the 'threat'. Everyone, except the First Nations people, who understand this land, its seasons, its very elements and its animals, because they are a part of this land, they share its elements. They move with the elements rather than trying to argue with a thunderstorm.

I am a foreigner who has found a home here. I stay because I love the unique fusion of cultures I have experienced nowhere else on this planet. Its people have taught me to see the human behind multi-coloured skins, to honour other cultures, to be curious about their ways and learn new perspectives. Everyone is meeting as equals. Everyone here is from somewhere else. Everyone, except the First Nations people, who have been ignored and mistreated throughout this young nations' histories, whose culture we are only beginning to explore in art and whose wisdom we don't understand because we have yet to try. They have learned our ways and are trying to bridge a gap we are barely even aware of.

Australia has welcomed me with open arms for my skills. I have learned here that the sum is greater than its parts. Everyone shares their complementary skills cooperatively to create something unique. Everyone learns from one another in the process and is enriched by the experience. Everyone is allowed to offer their skills in the service to the Australian patchwork community. Everyone, except the First Nations people, whose skills none of the rest of us immigrants have and we lack. We still believe we are separate. We still believe we have the right to own pieces of this land and do to it, and with it, what we will without consequences. How long before we realise that we're in the same boat as the First Nations people, as we sell pieces of this land to foreign nationals? How long before they plant their flag on this soil and history repeats itself? The First Nations people understand that we cannot 'own' land, it 'owns' us. We are here to serve it and we live or die with it. How long, before we accept the consequences of our actions? That's a rhetorical question, a more apt question would be: will we do so in time?

'Our' Australia challenges our perceptions regularly. As custodians of this land and advocates for its animals, the First Nations people understand this better than the rest of us from far away. In the challenges that not just Australia but this planet faces, we humans need to combine all our strengths to mitigate our weaknesses and short-sightedness. The First Nations people know you cannot breathe in without exhaling. Likewise, you cannot take without giving back. They have already survived a plague this planet has send their way: us. We are like a swarm of locusts leaving devastation in our wake as we offshore its riches to the highest bidder. I find it admirable that the First Nations people are extending their hands in friendship, setting aside the centuries of mistreatment and disrespect in an effort to help us all heal. We would be a plague of fools, if we choose to ignore it.

To honour all that Australia has taught me, in service to the Australian community, I add my voice to the First Nations voice from the heart to meet the First Nations people as equals (at the very least, they are showing themselves to be superior by far in seeing beyond short-term gains), to allow them to offer their unique skills in service to this community and this country, to embrace their wisdom and cultural heritage into the multi-cultural Australian quilt.

To the First Nations people: I am sorry I never thought to speak out on your behalf before, though I have lived here for some time. Please forgive me, that it has taken me so long to understand that we are citizens of this planet (though there is no passport for it) far more than of a single nation (though your roots are deepest in this country). I honour, respect and am awed by the strength, perseverance and compassion you show the people of this nation, despite the misunderstanding, ignorance and cruelty you have braved and are still facing every day. I thank you for your hospitality and inclusiveness that allows me to sit here and write my perspective. If any of my words, skills or experiences can assist you, they are yours.

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