



**The Uniting Church in Australia**  
NORTHERN SYNOD

31<sup>st</sup> August 2024

Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretariat,

### **Inquiry into Truth and Justice Commission Bill 2024**

My name is Rev Janet Staines, General Secretary of the Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, living on Larrakia Land.

The Uniting Church in the Northern Territory is committed to working with our First Nations People. The Northern Regional Council of Congress (NRCC) is a regional committee of the National Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and a Presbytery of the Northern Synod. Representatives of more than 28 Aboriginal congregations from East Arnhem Land, West Arnhem Land, the West Kimberley region of Western Australia, Alice Springs, Aputula and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia, make up the Presbytery.

The Uniting Church of the Northern Synod is committed to Truth-telling as an ongoing shared and active process between First Nations Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians that must be more than First Nations Peoples revisiting their trauma; this means the majority of Australians have a responsibility to engage in truth-listening to confront the ways in which the settler colonial system continues to benefit non-Indigenous peoples at the expense of First Nations rights.

Our church is currently mourning the passing of **Rev Dr Gondarra OAM**, a giant in the life of the Uniting Church and Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and a revered Yolŋu leader. At a State Memorial Service, held at Nungalinga College on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2024, we gave thanks for his incredible contribution to our journey of reconciliation, his unwavering compassion for his people and his deep insights into the God who walks with us all.

Rev. Sharon Hollis, UCA President said of this giant: "Rev. Dr. Gondarra OAM was instrumental in the founding of the Uniting Aboriginal Islander Christian Congress and provided visionary leadership to Congress, the Uniting Church and the global church for over four decades. He was the first and only Indigenous Moderator in the Uniting Church. He served on the World Council of Churches Central Committee and was a pioneer of Indigenous theology both in Australia and around the world. Rev. Dr. Gondarra OAM was a tireless advocate for his people and their right to sovereignty and self-determination."

*I would like to acknowledge that I live and work on the traditional lands of the Larrakia people and pay my respects to all Elders past, present and future generations.*

I write to submit the recent film, "Luku Ngarra: The Law of the Land" [www.lukungarrafilm.com](http://www.lukungarrafilm.com) by Director Sinem Saban to the Commission. Filmed over 5 years in Northeast Arnhem Land, *Luku Ngarra - The Law of the Land* is a confronting and intimate journey into the world of the Yolŋu First Nations of Australia. At its centre is a remarkable man, the late Rev Dr Gondarra OAM, who was a tireless beacon for freedom and justice for Indigenous Australians for the last 50 years, as well as a highly respected clan leader, traditional lawman, spiritual leader and civil rights activist.

***'Without truth-telling there can be no mutual respect,  
and without mutual respect  
there will never be meaningful and empowering political change.'  
- The late Rev Dr Gondarra OAM***

With over 60 years as a cross-cultural educator and mediator and staunch advocate for Treaty, Rev Dr Gondarra always believed that through education comes mutual respect, and from there opens the pathway to solutions that are not tokenistic but meaningful and empowering for First Nations.

Truth Telling Together is an Education Movement to inspire all Australians to commit to the journey of educating themselves and others about Indigenous history and culture and to become well informed about the issues we face from colonisation. The website [www.truthtellingtogether.com](http://www.truthtellingtogether.com) houses hundreds of updated resources to help people and communities on their learning journey to inspire the growth of mutual respect through truth-telling and education, and to aspire for meaningful and empowering political change that comes through Makarrata – an indigenous led and controlled solution process, eventually leading to Treaty with First Nations.

The establishment of a national Truth and Justice Commission would support the truth telling processes advocated by Rev Dr Gondarra and the Commitment of the Uniting Church Northern Synod as a powerful and transformative process that can change how individuals see each other, develop greater collective responsibility and establish the foundations for genuine reconciliation.

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry and sincerely hope the points I have raised will be considered.

Grace & Peace,

  
Rev Janet Staines  
General Secretary

  
**Northern Synod  
Uniting Church in Australia**

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