



RESPONSE TO THE COVENANTING STATEMENT

UNITING ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER CHRISTIAN CONGRESS

*read by Pastor Bill Hollingsworth, National Chairperson, Uniting Aboriginal
and Islander Christian Congress*

When God created the heavens and the earth He gave humankind his habitation and placed him within his bounds. When He did this He gave humankind stewardship over the bounds of his habitation. We are also told in the Bible that when God had finished creating it was good.

For many thousands of years Aboriginal people moved in harmony with creation and subdued it as necessary by hunting, fishing and gathering, thus respecting God's command and allowing the earth to sustain us. Our laws were developed by our relationship with the land and our intricate system of inter-tribal government. Trade was established, which has never been acknowledged or understood appropriately by European researchers.

In 1788 this relation with creation was violently disrupted by the invasion of the European, which robbed us of our stewardship of the land which God gave to us.

Your ancestors came to us in different ways and we saw little of our caring God in them. They did not come to us as God's will would dictate but to dispossess us, take our children, rape our women, kill our men and boys and destroy our culture, reject our values and beliefs and to ultimately claim our lands as their own.

As a direct result of this violent dispossession Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have lived as strangers and outcasts in their own land.

Whilst the church attempted to stem the decimation of our people and culture by providing missions and sanctuaries, in very many instances it did not attempt to understand our ways, our laws or social and economic structures.

We agree with you that the church, which had a responsibility to be the conscience of the invaders, in many instances relinquished this responsibility and joined with the invaders in a great many atrocities by smoothing the pillow for what was believed to be a dying race. Many of our people look upon the church in our country as condoning what was happening and watched the church stand by as our future was slowly being shortened by westernisation, assimilation and policies of prejudice.

Along with the past governments of Australia, the church is held accountable in our society for the injustices/ atrocities inflicted on our people.

Contrary to the belief of the invaders that they had a divine right to take possession of this land as their own, the God of righteousness, truth and justice has sustained us with the belief that one day we would be recognised as the true stewards of this land. This has come to pass through the High Court decision which was handed down in the Mabo case.

It is good and right that the church should repent of any of its actions in support of a policy that violently discriminated against and oppressed God's stewards of this land.

The UAICC believes it is just for the Uniting Church, as a result of its enlightened understanding of the Gospel implications of creating new community to offer a practical response to the past history of dispossession



and resulting disenfranchisement of Aboriginal and Islander people from their social, economic and spiritual development of Australia by taking action to empower the UAICC ministry by offering to share the assets of the Uniting Church. It is difficult for us again, to recall the atrocities of the past and agree to walk towards you and offer forgiveness because many of our people feel your position of influence in our present society reminds us of who committed these great offences.

As a result of the violent dispossession and resulting isolation from economic empowerment in Australia, within a great number of our people there has developed a deep anger and resentment of European people.

Therefore it would be wrong to just say "I forgive", without reaching a commitment to work together to lay a new foundation upon which we may build a more just future together by ensuring that the Uniting Church plays an active role in providing adequate resources to address the present disadvantages caused by the past injustices and dispossession by the invasion of this country. Your commitment to be practical in seeking to be united in a new relationship will be assessed by your decisions to resource the Congress ministry and to be actively involved in ministry alongside and with Aboriginal and Islander people to change the present disadvantage.

Because it is pleasing to God to love one another, and it is our commitment to do so, we invite you on behalf of Congress members to develop a new relationship by entering into the struggle of those issues that presently are the cause of continuing injustice resulting in broken relationships.

You seek our forgiveness because your understanding has been enlightened by the Spirit of the living God to recognise the failures and mistakes of the past and you desire to establish a new relationship based upon real recognition, justice and equality.

We come to this covenanting table with our gifts of Aboriginal spirituality, our culture, our Aboriginal way of loving and caring, our instinctive concern and a willingness to share and teach our history and every good aspect about being Aboriginal and Islander.

Our commitment to walk together with you as equals will be measured by our willingness to share with you our friendship and our love for God's creation. Our people have survived on the fruits of this country and have harvested from gardens as diverse as nature can offer.

We give to you our foods, drinks, the flesh of our animals, the fish of our waters and birds of the air that have sustained our people for generations gone by.

We pray that God will guide you, together with us, in developing a covenant to walk together practically so that the words of your statement may become a tangible expression of His justice and love for all creation. We ask you to remember this covenant by remembering that our land is now sustaining your people by God's grace.