

**Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA**

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## **Treaty-Truth Telling**

Thank you for this important opportunity to talk today about Treaty.

I'm sure some of you must be wondering – why are these people still talking about Treaty after so long?

It's been 30 years since the Barunga statement and there has not been much progress. In fact many things seem to be going backwards.

In the last 30 years Yolŋu have felt the full force of oppression. Government policies like the Intervention, super-shires, English-only schools have impacted greatly on our wellbeing.

We are being pushed to suicide and we suffer from ill health, low education levels, and high incarceration rates.

Whoever it was that invented the Intervention and then even worse, whoever it was that invented Stronger Futures – those people tried to kill our culture, they really wanted it dead.

But we are still here. We are nursing wounds but we are still here fighting until we are heard.

Balanda ways/ Njapaki ways are failing us, strangling our spirit. Balanda governance is failing us. It is time for self – governance.

Those things we have been fighting for for 30 years, they haven't gone away and they will not go away.

So, what is it then? What is this thing we keep fighting for? What is Treaty?

Well, let me start at the beginning. You can't understand Treaty until you first understand Sovereignty. This is right at the start. If you can't understand Sovereignty then you will never understand Treaty.

To be clear, Yolŋu were never conquered. Our culture, our language, our law remains intact.

We are a sovereign people.

For some people, sovereignty is a scary word.

What they hear is that we want to get rid of you, to make you go away. Well that's not right, that's not what Yolŋu mean when they are talking about Sovereignty.

We are not looking to send anyone away – we know you live here too – we know this is your home and our home.

Let me give you an example that might help you to understand what Yolngu mean when they talk about Sovereignty. You see, we Yolngu have had Treaties before. This is not our first time.

For many years, for a long long time we had a Treaty with the Macassan's. We worked in partnership and trade with them. It was a good relationship.

This relationship started with recognition. It started with an understanding of each other's Sovereignty as separate nations. The Macassan's they came here and they started fishing. But then, not long after they realised there were already people here and they knew they couldn't continue without talking to those people first. Straight away they recognized the Sovereignty of the Yolngu people that were already living here.

It is the same today. We were here at the start and we haven't gone anywhere. The right way is to come and talk to us, to negotiate with us as equals and to work out an agreement for the future, so that our authority is clearly understood.

Sovereignty is about control, it is about power. It is about recognizing that we are a real nation, with real governance, real laws and real authority.

Right now, this Federal Government does not recognise our sovereignty at all. It does not see what we have to say as important let alone recognize Aboriginal people as Sovereign nations.

Look at what happened with that Uluru Statement. Now I wasn't there at Uluru but I participated in the discussions when they were happening in Darwin. But those people that were there at Uluru, they came from across Australia, they sat down and they talked and all agreed on that one statement to give to the Prime Minister.

It is a good pathway and the Prime Minister should think again and change his mind.

The point of truth-telling, is that it is time for everyone to tell the truth about our history. Where the Governments fail to tell the truth about invasion, massacre and sovereignty – they are unlawful. The Uluru Statement creates a path to right these wrongs.

It is time for all of us to recognise the law of this land and abide by it. It's time for us to be truthful and employ Yolngu Rom Njurrungu.

I acknowledge that the Northern Territory Government are bringing serious conversation to the table. But so far they are yet to include the people. Government's must negotiate with Nations and allow for traditional decision-making processes and this will require resources.

Ultimately, we want the big one – a Treaty with the Federal Government that is long overdue. But treaties of different types at all levels of Government that recognise Sovereignty will bring vast improvement.

Our success as a Sovereign Nation is well documented. For thousands of years we lived with good health, strong in our identity, strong in our language, strong in our law. We nurtured the land, the creatures and the people with knowledge and wisdom that had been passed

from our elders, ancestors, and the creator spirits. We did not know suicide, depression, drug addiction, family violence.

We hold onto this past knowledge now, and we fight for Treaty. We fight for Treaty to create a space to maintain our culture: to become modern Yolŋu people with the wisdom of our ancestors and the traditions of our law.

When I say 'space', I am talking about a space to create modern Yolŋu society:

- Space to determine our education aspirations
- Space to create Yolŋu models of employment
- Space to resolve land tenure disagreements
- Space for Yolŋu elders and leaders to maintain law and order and use our programs to resolve family violence, rehabilitate offenders of all crimes and provide healing for victims of drug abuse and depression.
- We need space to prioritise resource distribution based on our determination: such as alleviating overcrowded housing and supporting homeland development.
- We can work in partnership to further develop programs that prevent kidney disease, heart disease and other illness through education founded on two ways knowledge.
- The resources on our country should be available for our economic benefit through local owned fisheries, croc farms, tourism etc. Support for the development of sustainable Yolŋu businesses creates a pathway for our success.

This is the space that we need to begin to determine our future. It is a space for genuine partnership between sovereign nations.

And it has to start with returning power to the Yolŋu elders and leaders where it belongs without manipulation and intervention.

We have a system of governance and this system of governance will determine our future under Yolŋu control. Men and Women, elders and leaders, standing strong and protecting our people and our culture.

I want to finish with something positive.

I want to take you back to the Macassan's before I finish, to remind you all that we have done it before.

We have been fighting for a long time now but Treaty will happen again. There is hope.

Thank you.