

Media release
{Embargoed until 17 August 2023}
The Voice – Speaking from the heart of Jewish values

Speaking from the heart of Jewish values (Emet - the value of truth, Teshuva - repentance and Tzedek - justice), the peak rabbinic, lay and youth leaders of the Progressive Jewish Movement across Australia have come together to support the referendum to amend the Constitution.

Co-Presidents of the Union for Progressive Judaism, David D. Knoll AM and Brian Samuel OAM described the choice facing Australian voters in stark terms:

[“We acknowledge the existing diversity of opinions within our community. To us, however, the choice facing Australians is do we provide a constitutional guarantee that Indigenous Australian will be listened to by the Commonwealth Government, or do we provide them no guarantee and make listening to their advice entirely optional?”](#)

Chairperson of the Progressive Zionist youth movement, Netzer, Avishai Conyer described the referendum [“as a historic step towards justice and reconciliation.”](#) He added [“For too long, Australia has failed to hear the cry for dignity, respect, and justice from Australia’s First Nations.”](#)

Rabbi Allison Conyer, the Chairperson of the Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors observed that:

[“Like our First Nations people, Jews have also experienced the deep silence that follows atrocity and genocide, the experience of being abandoned by humanity, the struggle for recognition of confronting truths, and the tormenting powerlessness of not being heard. We believe that First Nations peoples deserve the power to guide their own destinies.”](#)

The statement issued today calls on the Jewish community on to take into account the Jewish values addressed in the statement and to engage in open-minded conversations to make as informed a decision as possible at the referendum.

The full text of the statement now follows.

“Justice, Justice You Shall Pursue”

The Union for Progressive Judaism, the Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors and our affiliated youth movement, Netzer, acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live, learn and pray, and pay our respect to their elders, past, present, and emerging. We, as representatives of Progressive Judaism in the Asia-Pacific, are committed to advocating for human rights throughout our region, and beyond. Central to being a Progressive Jew is a commitment to Tikkun Olam, which is to strive to improve the world in which we live.

As it is written, “You have been told what is good and what the Source of all Life demands from you: Only to pursue justice, love goodness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Because of this commitment, we recognise the deep moral and political significance of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, where Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples called for a constitutionally guaranteed First Nations Voice, the fulfilment of which would require an amendment to the Australian Constitution to establish such a body (Voice).

Jews have also experienced the deep silence that follows atrocity and genocide, the experience of being abandoned by humanity, the struggle for recognition of confronting truths, and the tormenting powerlessness of not being heard. Our Jewish values call us to action to stand in solidarity with Australia’s First Nations peoples. Emet, the value of truth, imbues us with the responsibility to acknowledge the difficult truth of First Nations peoples suffering. Teshuva, repentance, requires us to atone for our past wrongs and work towards reconciliation. Tzedek, justice, demands that we fight for the representation of First Nations peoples in our parliamentary system. As it is written, “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21). Voice is power. And First Nations peoples deserve the power to guide their own destinies. We have a long and diverse history, and so do Australia’s First Nations. As Jews, we can understand their passion for preserving their cultural heritage and the importance of passing it onto future generations.

On behalf of the Progressive Jewish Movement in Australia, and noting the support for this statement of Progressive Judaism Victoria, and as proud affiliates of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, we support the referendum to amend the Constitution as an historic step towards justice and reconciliation, and pledge to work within and outside our own communities to move towards a better future for all.

We openly acknowledge the existing diversity of opinions within our community and Australia, and invite all to further research the matter, hear and listen to those affected by the proposed constitutional change, to take into account the Jewish values addressed above and to engage in open-minded conversations to make as informed a decision as possible at the referendum.

David D Knoll AM and Brian Samuel OAM
Co-Presidents
Union for Progressive Judaism

Rabbi Allison RH Conyer
Chairperson
Assembly of Rabbis and Cantors

Avishai Conyer
Chairperson
Netzer Australia

Contact: David D Knoll AM 0416 209 679
Rabbi Allison Conyer 0423 055 703