

By Dianne Jacobs

What must it be like to live with systemic discrimination and exclusion. To endure the intergenerational trauma of children being taken away from their families. To grieve the murders, violence and loss. To have your long-held knowledge systems unheeded. To deal with unfulfilled promises and misaligned policies. To see your people, the original and sole occupiers and owners of the land with a thriving culture for over sixty millennia, be treated as the 'other'. Envisage the pain.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart is an invitation to the Australian people from First Nations Australians to walk together to build a better future.

It is affecting in its hopes and aspirations for dignity and justice. "When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country," could not be more poignant.

To forge a new narrative about who we are as a nation shows a generosity of spirit by First Nations Australians. It gives extraordinary possibility to shape the society we want to be and the legacy we will leave for coming generations.

There is nothing to fear. Our democratic and governance processes are strong. The Voice will enable representations to Parliament and the executive government on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There are no veto powers. It will assist the elected policy and law makers in their deliberations.

Indigenous disadvantage is evident in health and life expectancy outcomes, child mortality, incarceration, education, employment and economic security. We are being asked to consider more thoughtfully, a way in which indigenous and non-indigenous Australians can co-create what might be for First Nations people. The Uluru Statement from the Heart offers an eloquent pathway.

The robust discussions leading up to the referendum will be fraught. A yes vote at the referendum is an opportunity, as Prime Minister Albanese said, for Australians “to show their best qualities: their generosity, their sense of fairness, their optimism for the future.”

Each of us wants to be heard, to be understood and for our voice to matter. Respectful conversations are how we connect and learn. It is a mutual experience. One that draws on being truly open and willing to listen. The Voice presents us with such a gift.

The referendum on establishing a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution is an inflection point in history for Australia.

It is a significant moment in which to define our future as a forward-looking, mature nation that embraces the diversity and contribution of all its citizens and does so democratically.