

2022 Garma Key Forum - Yolŋu leadership in the Modern World: Yingiya Guyula MLA, Member for Mulka, 30th July 2022

(19-minute speech can be viewed on you tube [here](#)¹)

A truly powerful speech about Australian Constitution and current moves towards a referendum and need to move towards Truth Treaty and Treaty alongside this current process Now.

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Good Morning Bukmak,

Welcome to Yolŋu country, welcome to our home where our ancestors and our law rest on this land.

Welcome Prime Minister and Members of Parliament. Thank you for coming and thank you to the elders and organisers here.

Over my lifetime I have seen our two worlds meet – I was part of a generation of children that saw Yolŋu and Balanda coming together.

Right now – my life as a Senior Yolŋu leader and a Member of the Northern Territory Parliament is about trying to create harmony between two worlds and two cultures.

So far in our history – the outcome of these two worlds coming together has not been harmonious. It has often been violent and continues to be violent.

The high rates of poverty, incarceration, overcrowding, unemployment, suicide, family violence, community violence, school refusal, early deaths and deaths from preventable diseases – shows us that our communities are in a state of crisis that is about survival.

The survival of our culture and people, and the fight to be Yolŋu is happening each and everyday in our communities.

It is the reason why I have been elected twice, as an Independent Member, as a voice for Yolŋu people.

Our people are speaking strongly when they vote for me – because I was standing for Treaty and Yolŋu Rom Ngurrungu – Our Way First.

We are fighting for our sovereignty to be recognised and respected - so that we can create two-ways systems and institutions that bring a better way of life for our people – so that we can move out of crisis and survival and towards a future that is welcoming of Yolŋu people and culture.

A future that gives space and acceptance to our way of life without the constant push and pressure to assimilate.

A future that brings Yolŋu self determination and self governance.

I was born on my father's country at Marapay in Buckingham Bay. The first 10 years of my life was a traditional life with very little outside influence.

I can remember Bapa Sheppy's plane flying in to collect crocodile skins for trade and throwing out Barley Sugar sweets for the kids.

And I remember moving to higher ground in the wet season and then deep into the heart of the Arafura swamp in the dry season.

We moved all around the country - moving with the seasons to different places – knowing the land that would care for us all year round.

We walked for miles and miles and that was how it was done.

I was educated by my elders, and by my kin. It is an education in which many adults had the responsibility of teaching me about my languages, caring for country and kin, about the Law, about Yolŋu knowldges and about self-discipline.

¹Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA , Garma 2022 , 30/07/2022 (19 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpuBOzxu6cM>

Our education is a life long journey that produces leaders with deep knowledge - similar to high level university study, and with the authority of a high court judge.

However, at the age of 10 my family decided that I could go to school on Elcho Island, and this was the beginning of my journey to understand two-worlds and two-ways.

As an adult, I came to learn about aircraft engineering through working with MAF, and I studied to become a pilot in Ballarat. During this time I was learning about the Balanda world – I was learning about the culture, the language, how to be polite, the customs and the law.

But I was a long way from my country and my culture - and my own education from my Yolŋu elders was missing.

And as I walked in two worlds, I felt like a dog with two masters, and these masters were walking in different directions and I was becoming exhausted and confused from running between them, and in the end I had to choose to return to my country and people to gain the knowledge I needed to become who I am now.

And this is the problem for our future generations- because they need to have opportunities in both worlds.

Instead of two paths going in different directions – we need two paths that are side by side – so close that they can be walked on at the same time.

But it is not the Yolŋu who need to move across to close this gap – it is the balanda systems and institutions that do not recognise our sovereignty, that do not allow for another worldview or perspective – that must move.

Institutions that are transplanted straight from urban towns and pushed upon us – such as a mainstream western school systems, or the balanda policing and justice system, or the CDP programs – that push for a system of work and employment that is not about community minded care or Yolŋu prosperity.

These institutions have stripped Yolŋu of our rightful place - as educators, as peacekeepers, as leaders.

It has undermined our governance processes.

It has removed our ability to make decisions for our communities and ultimately these institutions have deprived us of our rightful place as leaders of our people.

As we come to the end of the Intervention and the end of the Stronger Futures – we have barely survived another wave of colonisation – but many people have asked the question – what would I like to see now?

I have said that we need to feel the rollback of the intervention – we need to feel it – the same way we felt the Intervention pushed on top of us- suffocating us, we now need to feel that pressure being removed.

Rather than the silence of a policy lapsing – we need to see a better day.

This would feel like the beginning of Treaty negotiations

In my mind, the opposite of the Intervention is Treaty.

The Intervention was shameful. It was a systematic dehumanisation of all Aboriginal people, that took our rights away

and the end of that era must be about: the assertion of our sovereignty through diplomatic conversations– between the Federal Government and those First Nations that want to create Treaty agreements.

The discussion about the Statement of the Heart is a very important one.

Voice, Treaty and Truth are about First Nations people reclaiming our story so we build our future.

The Constitution of this country has been wrong from the very beginning because it never came under the power of a Treaty. It is a foreign institution on stolen land – and it will never be legitimate without the agreement of First Nations people.

Ideally, an amendment to the Constitution should recognise all three elements of the statement - Voice, Treaty, and Truth should be enshrined and protected together, so that all Australians can be proud of who we are.

I have been elected by the people of this land –

I have been elected twice on the platform of Treaty!

and before I die I want to be part of a Federal Treaty process.

We are here in my Electorate.

And the name of this Electorate is Mulka.

The word Mulka means a diplomatic and welcoming space – it means come as delegates and sit down with us. Don't come here with the idea of power over us – or decisions made for us

This is a truth-telling space where you don't hide anything.

And Garma is a Mulka space for telling the truth. You don't stand in a court or in the Yolŋu ceremonial space and tell lies – because lies are not part of Yolŋu Rom – it is not our law.

We have been promised Treaty in the past. But as the Yothu Yindi band sang “ like writing in the sand ...” that promise disappeared.

But this time we hear the commitment of this Prime Minister and this Government and I want to ensure that there is urgency to work towards Voice, Treaty and Truth at the same time – not one before the other.

We have been waiting a long time for Treaty to come.

Our generous spirits, our trust and our hospitality have been abused and our elders who began this call for Treaty have passed away.

I respectfully call on the Prime Minister and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs to begin the process of Treaty Making, alongside the establishment of the Voice and Truth Telling - without delay.

I would not be doing my job of bringing harmony to our cultures if I did not call strongly for this today!

Thank you [Yingiya Mark Guyula MLA]

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AUSTRALIA Live Updates: Prime Minister introduces draft referendum question on Indigenous vote to Parliament, 30 July 2022 (ABC News: Michael Franchi)

*Independent NT politician **Mark Guyula Yingiya** has given a stirring speech in Garma, saying Aboriginal communities are in “crisis” and struggling with “constant pressure to assimilate”. While he welcomed the holding of the referendum, he said it was an agreement that Aboriginal people urgently needed.*

“We have been promised a contract in the past, but that promise disappeared,” he said. He said the Yolngu elders who demanded a treaty decades ago are now dead because promises made to them have been broken.

A Yolngu elder said Australia’s constitution as it stands is “wrong”.

“This is a foreign institution on stolen land, it will never be legitimate without the consent of the First Nations.

“It has been wrong because it was never within the scope of the contract.”

Reports from Gulkula by Indigenous Affairs Editor Bridget Brennan ²

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² <https://trends.techno-ar.com/live-updates-prime-minister-introduces-draft-referendum-question-on-indigenous-vote-to-parliament>