

Voice, Treaty, Truth of Uluru Statement begins in the classroom

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Indigenous lawyer and human rights advocate Teela Reid urged the teaching profession to educate students about the real truth of Australia's history and to embrace the Uluru Statement from the Heart at Federation's Annual Conference.

The 33-year-old solicitor who participated in the Sydney constitutional dialogue that culminated in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, labelled the document as a "gift" to the Australian people.

"There was a political and strategic decision not to give the Uluru Statement to politicians," Ms Reid, a proud Wiradjuri women from Gilgandra, told delegates.

"It was gifted to comrades like you, on the ground, in the community, who are going to get your students to read the statement, get your students to engage in further research, and do something because every time we have handed over petitions [to politicians] in the past they have been hung on the walls of Parliament and collected dust.

"Please don't let that happen to this generation. Please don't let this hard work drag out and the struggle last again for another five to 10 years. Our people simply cannot wait.

"You know the statistics, you know things are only getting worse for your students, for the decisions being made about your schools, your policies, and what First Nations students' resources are going into those schools."

Ms Reid said the Uluru Statement was not a symbolic document but "hard law political reform".

"I believe in the Uluru Statement and the movement ... to enshrine a First Nations voice in the Constitution, to address unfinished business, to ensure our children live a better life than those of our past, so they find their rightful place in their own country," she said.

"We need people like you on the ground educating the students, not only on the Uluru Statement, but on what the reforms mean, the history of this country and why there is unfinished business for our First Nations peoples."

Ms Reid was the first Aboriginal Vice President (Social Justice) of the UNSW Law Society and was the inaugural recipient of the NSW Barristers' Trust Award for her university contributions. After attending Gilgandra's



primary and secondary schools, she went on to become a high school PE teacher and was selected as Australia's female Indigenous youth delegate to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues.

She admitted to be more interested in sport at school and told of a teacher at Gilgandra High who "believed" in her abilities.

"Your jobs and your roles are very powerful, not only on an individual level but also empowering our young First Nations students to pick themselves up, to have a sense of identity and to believe in themselves," she said. "Because these days I see so many of them come through the criminal justice system and you probably see them in your own classrooms, where they're going to end up.

"We need you to walk with us, to enshrine a First Nations voice and imagine that moment when Australia passes that referendum, the nation-building exercise we undertake then, because of treaty and truth telling.

"We've had royal commissions ... they're truth-telling exercises ... nothing changes unless structural reform is implemented.

"It is up to you to get your students on board and teach them the real truth and history of this country, to ensure they know and they understand the importance of law reform, enshrining a voice, and engaging in treaty and truth telling because we look shameful on an international scale."

Scott Coomber