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suicides in the Kimberley of Western Australia to the children being shackled and hooded in the Northern Territory.

The main theme of the celebrations on January 26 is commemorating the arrival of European settlers in Sydney. For many Indigenous Australians, this is and will be an unpalatable fact, which marks an ending to their freedoms on

*The debate around Australia Day is getting increasingly heated despite successive Australian governments attempting to ignore or silence the First Nations. Fremantle City Council in Western Australia wished to move its Australia Day citizenship ceremony away from January 26 to a more culturally inclusive event. Yet, the Council had to back down under pressure. In Melbourne Victoria, Darebin, Yarra and Moreland City Councils wanted to terminate the Australia Day celebrations and to drop all references to it except for continuing to hold citizenship ceremonies.*

that day of January 26, 1788. January 26 also commemorates 80 years since a group of Aboriginal people courageously gathered at Australia Hall in

Sydney for a 'Day of Mourning' and demanding education, full citizenship and equality for all. So, they have been protesting for a long time. So, does Australia Day in its current form allow for a holistic opportunity to commemorate the best of times of all its peoples?



Rightly interpreted, such a day cannot stand for the ideals and values of justice and equality. Hence, for the First Nations, it is not a day of celebration, but a day that marks the anniversary of colonisation; it becomes a day of reflection, mourning, a day that represents the brutal, ongoing dispossession and oppression of their lands, culture and people, and a day to fight for justice and equality. So far, politicians have refused

to listen to or respect the views of the aboriginal people. For example, recently the Prime Minister of Australia dismissed the famous Uluru Statement from the Heart of the aboriginal people. This Statement called for a voice in Parliament and a genuine journey towards treaty. Similarly, the Indigenous Affairs Minister acts deaf and blind to all the voices and demands for inclusiveness, justice, fairness and equality. The Minis-

ment and for recognition. Reconciliation with the First Nations is not simply a goodwill gesture. The immense damage caused to them can only be addressed through a process of reconciliation, treaty and reparation. In recent years the tide appears to be slowly but steadily shifting towards creating an inclusive national celebration.

The debate around Australia Day is getting increasingly heated despite successive Australian governments attempting to ignore or silence the First Nations. Fremantle City Council in Western Australia wished to move its Australia Day citizenship ceremony away from January 26 to a more culturally inclusive event. Yet, the Council had to back down under pressure. In Melbourne Victoria, Darebin, Yarra and Moreland City Councils wanted to terminate the Australia Day celebrations and to drop all references to it except for continuing to hold citizenship ceremonies. The Prime Minister of Australia said that a critique of and a boycott of Australia Day is a repudiation of the values the day celebrates: freedom, a fair go, mateship and diversity. However, all facts indicate that the Australia Day held on January 26 does not inclusively commemorate the best of times of its peoples.

ter for Immigration and Border Protection says that Australia Day is not a political day and should not be hijacked for other purposes.

For more than 80 years, many Australians from all walks of life have come together to support the campaign of the First Nations. Today, hundreds of thousands will call upon for a change to when Australia celebrates its national day, for a treaty, for a voice to parlia-

Today, let us respect the survival and resilience of our First Nations, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. One cannot continue to celebrate a national day on a day of mourning for the First Nations of the country. We cannot and should not leave First Nations voices unheard. As a community united as Australians, we need to demand a fair, just and inclusive future for all Australians!

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