



## Pope Francis visits Democratic Republic of Congo

Pope Francis commenced his visit to the DRC on 1 February. The population of the Congo is just under 100 million people, about 50% of whom are Catholic. The country's immense natural resources of gold, diamonds and copper have long been plundered by Europe and other countries. Now there is intense competition from China and the US for its lithium and cobalt, minerals critical for converting the world's economies to renewable energy. Despite this, DRC is one of the world's poorest countries.



*Poster denouncing child labour, DRC*

In his address to the nation, Pope Francis urged the Congolese people to take their destiny into their own hands by rejecting violence and hatred. He noted that the Congolese people are “infinitely more precious than any treasure found in their fruitful soil”. To the international community, he said “Hands off the Democratic Republic of the Congo! Hands off Africa! Stop choking Africa: it is not a mine to be stripped or a terrain to be plundered. May Africa be the protagonist of its own destiny!”

### **“If you want to cultivate peace, protect Creation”<sup>1</sup>**

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI passed away on 31 December 2022. Pope Benedict often spoke of the need for each of us to realise we are part of creation, and of our responsibility to care for it. Pope Francis often quotes from Pope Benedict in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, for example, “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts (*of our hearts*) have become so vast” (LS217, quoting from a 2005 homily of Pope Benedict).



As Pope Francis said at Benedict's funeral: “Father, into your hands we commend his spirit”.

<sup>1</sup> Message for World Day of Peace 2010, Pope Benedict XVI

## A Voice to Parliament and the Government



The Prime Minister has announced that this year all Australians will be asked to vote in a Referendum as to whether a First Nations Voice should be enshrined in the Australian Constitution.

This follows many years of discussion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments around the need for greater recognition and empowerment of Australia's indigenous people.

The "Uluru Statement from the Heart" was drafted in 2017 by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders following a series of regional dialogues initiated by the Referendum Council. The Statement expresses the desires of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples for reform to the Australian Constitution according to Indigenous priorities.

Already there are conflicting opinions being aired for and against the government's proposal which can be confusing, particularly if we don't have a clear understanding of what is being proposed. What is the Voice? What is the government proposing? What position will you take when it comes to the Referendum?

Here are several locations that will answer most questions and point the way to others you may have:

- The Uluru Statement - <https://ulurustatement.org/>
- Edmund Rice Centre - [https://www.erc.org.au/constitutional\\_recognition](https://www.erc.org.au/constitutional_recognition)
- A short online course on the Uluru Statement and the Voice proposal - <https://fromtheheart.com.au/education/#/>

### **"Carbon: the Unauthorised Biography" ABC IView**

This entertaining and educational documentary tells the story of carbon from its creation in the stars to its life in you and me, and its part in the global warming challenge the Earth is facing. Everyone interested in how we come to be and live on this planet, should watch it! Available on IView, <https://iview.abc.net.au/>

### **Prayer**

*I invite all believers to raise a fervent prayer to God, the all-powerful Creator and the Father of mercies, so that all men and women may take to heart the urgent appeal: If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation.*

Pope Benedict, Message for World Day of Peace, 2010