

# Interview with Stan Grant

By Caitlin McInnis

We were lucky enough to catch Stan Grant for a brief interview after he spoke at our conference in July. Drawing on his experiences both as an Indigenous Australian and award winning journalist, Grant spoke about a Treaty, the power of diplomacy and the continuing marginalisation of Indigenous Australians.

## What will a treaty achieve for indigenous rights?

Well there's several things, first of all, there are a lot of questions you need to ask: how, where and with whom you negotiate? Are they state based treaties or are they federal treaties? Is there a federal body that devolves power to local groups? How do you represent the multiplicity of interests of nations in Australia? So we need to define terms before we get down to negotiating.

Treaty itself, as we have seen around the world, enshrines the way people interact with government. It enshrines a set of laws and practices for a society to be able to function. For indigenous people it is creating a mechanism by which we can function in a society that has not always been seen to work for our benefit, in fact, it has done the opposite. It has left us marginalised and outside the process and we see that in terrible statistics that engulf Indigenous people still today. So treaty is a mechanism of dealing with the past, being able to acknowledge our history to back the rights inherent to indigenous people.

And I think...to enshrine these things in a broad western liberal democratic model that accommodate the group rights of the first people with the overarching rights and sovereignty of the state, that's the sort of challenge that we face.

Where that is done successfully...it leads to good capacity to building good governance, strong self-determination, and you can have positive outcomes and that is what we are really looking for.

## You're voice has become one that cannot be ignored, what is it about your approach that makes people listen?

I don't know, it can be ignored. People who want to just ignore what I say, they are welcome to. It doesn't mean people agree, it doesn't mean all Indigenous people agree. I'm sure there are Indigenous people who take a much harder line than I do.

I think mine is a conciliatory diplomatic voice. That's my nature. My view of the world is informed by my experience of the world, and having lived in the world of war and conflict does alter your world view. You cannot stand in the middle of a suicide bombing and see bodies blown to pieces...see heads severed from bodies, you cannot see [these things] and not have them impact on you. And I think I bring that to the way that I try to see our country and our place in this country. A country, first of all, where we can peacefully disagree and peacefully resolve our differences; a country that is blessed in so many ways with a stable foundation of democracy... You can't be the type of nation Australia proclaims to be, and seen to be, and still not find room to accommodate the rights of the first peoples successfully and in peace.

We can do that here. And so I suppose I try to speak to the diplomacy of that; to look at ways in which we can marry the rights of indigenous peoples into a broad western liberal democratic system. A system that, for all its faults, has been seen or can be seen to provide stability for the greatest number. And certainly, given the societies that I have seen, that have been fractured, ruled by despots, fraught with war and conflict, a country like Australia looks like a haven of peace. So why can't we get it right? That is my message.

***You can watch Stan Grant's conference address on "The Way Forward for Indigenous Reconciliation" [here on our YouTube channel](#).***

\*This interview has been edited for print.



Stan Grant speaking at our 2016 Human Rights Conference