



**First Speech by Carolyn Briggs
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

10 December 2019

So, firstly, I would like to pay my respects to the traditional owners and also pay my respects as part of the First Peoples of this land: of the Boon Wurrung, of the greater Kulin nation. I stood for the election because I believed that this was another way, the opportunity of moving forward and looking back over the ancestors that went before us. So it is about [Member spoke in language], the law of the land. It is about that, and the election to the Assembly provides a voice to the Victorian traditional owners and the wider Victorian Indigenous communities. I also want to acknowledge and celebrate the role of the Victorian nations' clans and families, who have played a major part in protecting and maintaining and celebrating the rich cultural heritage. It has been their voices, their struggles for the truth that have allowed us to achieve what we have today.

We often hear people talking about our culture and heritage, but I rarely hear about the strong black Aboriginal women and men whose struggles have been responsible for the protection and the development and the maintenance of our cultures—our great cultures. And it is time for this contribution by the nations, clans, families across Victoria to be acknowledged and to be celebrated. It is our mothers, fathers, grandmothers, great-grandfathers who have often been at the front line in protecting our children and their birthright. They protected and maintained the knowledge through their genealogies and stories. They negotiated with outsiders in order to protect their families. They stood up to the tyranny of oppression. And it is a voice that our ancestors have protected and kept our culture alive.

We must reclaim that voice and use it to continue to protect our heritage. We need to ensure that it is our voice that is heard; it is not just the voices of governments and bureaucrats. But we want to fight for a genuine treaty, and that will only ever be achieved when our voice is heard and respected. The treaty should be a compact with our ancestors to ensure that their voices are still heard and their memories protected. I believe that the truth is also an important element of the treaty. Truth is remaining true to our culture and our heritage. Truth is not something that is fabricated in support of government bureaucrats. The truth must be told, and we must stay vigilant in our stories, which will be remembered forever.

Our parents, our grandparents and our great-grandparents have all been a part of the struggle, that has required them to work together for this shared future. This can only be reflected by the actions from the early days of colonisation and those ones who fought. They fought to keep our families and clans together. They fought to access education for their children. They fought to set up health and legal services that sometimes we can take for granted today. They fought so that we can benefit from this shared future.





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We also need to respect the knowledge of the roles of those men and women who are still with us. These are the generations of Elders who have been in the forefront for many decades, and sometimes we take these Elders for granted, without remembering where we would be without their courage and their commitment. It is one of our great pleasures to see our young people who achieve great outcomes because of the work of their mothers and their fathers and their grandparents, who made the struggle possible. And because of this, we can celebrate our lawyers, doctors, teachers, craftsmen, artisans—these are all about our collective narratives. But many of the freedoms we can also take for granted were the hard-fought victories of strong, stubborn, persistent Black women and men, who never gave up.

