



**First Speech by Esmerelda Bamblett
Inaugural Meeting of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria**

10 December 2019

Thank you, Eleanor. My name is Esme Bamblett. I am a Bangerang, Wiradjuri, Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurong woman. Today I want to thank and praise the Lord for the opportunity we have been given to put into place another piece in the process to negotiate a treaty for Victorian Aboriginal communities. I also want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Kulin nations. I pay respect to their Elders both past and present, to all Elders who are watching today by live stream and to those Elders who are in the room with us.

I carry within me the image of my grandparents and am reminded of the struggles they overcame to survive in a land where they were dispossessed of country, language and a culture that was thousands of years old. But I also think about the legacy they passed on—strength, resilience, purpose and a passionate desire to fight for our rights no matter what adversity we may face. At the same time I acknowledge my mother and her 13 siblings, who taught me to care about the community and to stick up for those who are in need.

I can see in my mind's eye what a treaty would mean for our future generations: their rights would be a normal part of their lives, our culture would be valued and respected by everyone, our history known by anyone who comes to our country, the recognition of our people as traditional and continuing custodians of the land and reparation for past wrongs.

Finally, I want to say that this journey is a continuation of the one left by those who have gone before us, our giants in whose footprints we follow. We need to keep in mind that each step we take now will be followed by our future generations, so let us pursue our journey together, because no matter who our clans are, where we come from, we are all united in the cause for justice.

While I have no illusions about the difficult path we have ahead of us, I know that we have the collective power to fight and forge a new path and make a difference. In the words of Gerald Bostock, 'Rise up, black children!'

