

FIRST KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples - A new recognition?

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been over two decades in the making. It addresses the ways in which the fundamental freedoms and rights of the world's Indigenous Peoples should be recognised and protected. The elaboration of the Declaration set new levels of participation by Indigenous peoples in the United Nations standard setting processes. Indigenous peoples were involved throughout the process as full partners and participants. Hence the instrument reflects Indigenous aspirations for their rights. The Declaration covers the broad scope of the rights and interests of Indigenous peoples, including lands, territories and natural resources, culture, language, traditional knowledge and the right to identity and citizenship. In an historic landslide vote in September this year the United Nations General Assembly voted to adopt the Declaration – four nations states, including Australia voted against the adoption.

In this presentation, I look at the history of the elaboration of the Declaration and its key elements and critically analyses the reasons for the Australian government's decision to vote against the UN General Assembly resolution.