



## The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council

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### Pope Francis sends message to Australia's Indigenous Community

30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration of JP II's Visit to Alice Springs

Media Release

24 November 2016

As we prepare to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of St John Paul II's iconic words to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Alice Springs on 29 November 1986, we are strengthened and emboldened by a message of hope and a blessing received directly from the Holy Father, Pope Francis.

In recent weeks, NATSICC, with the assistance of the Bishops Conference used a video message to request a blessing from the Holy Father. Recorded in Alice Springs, the video features people that were present at Blatherskite Park in 1986. These people experienced firsthand the impact that St John Paul II's words made.

A letter accompanied the video, along with Spanish translations, which expressed the power of the event in Alice Springs.

Pope Francis wrote, "This anniversary affords me the happy opportunity to express my deep esteem for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for your ancient cultural heritage". Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is built on mutual respect and dignity and is holiness' opening message is most appropriate.

Drawing upon St John Paul II's words, Pope Francis reminds us that the culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is precious, with much to offer the Catholic Church around the world.

*"Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost."*

"We are overjoyed upon the receipt of the letter and blessing from his holiness," said NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak. "It is more than just a blessing, it is confirmation that we, as first Australians are appreciated and respected by the Catholic Church. "We, and the Church in Australia, are now challenged to continue to bring this respect to life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics."

“Pope Francis’ statement about his spiritual closeness with us is very important and we want this message to resonate across the length and breadth of this country,” Mr Lochowiak said.

This Sunday 27 November 2016, NATSICC calls the Church across Australia to come together in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and use the power of faith and unity to bring to life Pope Francis’ hope that “we offer a convincing and tangible sign that we are no longer strangers and sojourners, but ... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph2:19).

The full letter and blessing from Pope Francis can be downloaded and printed at [www.natsicc.org.au/pope-francis-message-to-indigenous-australians.html](http://www.natsicc.org.au/pope-francis-message-to-indigenous-australians.html)

Please spread this message of encouragement across your parishes and communities.

