

## **Galarrwuy Yunupingu AM**

### **Citation for the Award of the Doctor of Laws *honoris causa***

Galarrwuy Yunupingu was born at Gunyangara, near Yirrkala in the far north of Northern Australia in east Arnhem Land, a member of Gumatj clan of the Yolngu people. His relentless struggle for land rights and advocacy for the agency of his people have profoundly advanced the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Australia. His leadership of the Northern Land Council in securing the rights and interests of the Aboriginal Traditional Owners of the 'Top End' of the Northern Territory over two long terms over more than a quarter of a century resulted in the return of all Aboriginal Reserves and most claimed areas to Aboriginal ownership. His leadership of the Gumatj and neighbouring clans through his work as a Gumatj clan leader has resulted in economic development, a complex agreement with Rio Tinto Alcan in relation to the bauxite project near Nhulunbuy, securing benefits for the affected traditional owners.

From the early 1960s Galarrwuy Yunupingu began working with his father to achieve land rights for his people. As a young man he helped draw up the first bark petitions presented to the Australian Parliament in 1963, conceived in protest at the Australian Government's excision of Yolngu land for bauxite mining and challenging the rights of mining companies to exploit traditional Aboriginal territory. Framed with painted bark, the Yirrkala Bark Petitions became the first traditional Aboriginal documents recognised by the Commonwealth Parliament. The fundamental significance of these documents for Australian democracy deepens as the call for constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people grows louder and stronger.

In 1975, as the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill passed through the Australian Parliament, Galarrwuy Yunupingu joined the Northern Land Council, becoming Chairman two years later, a position he held for most of the subsequent years until his retirement in 2004. Throughout these many years he led negotiations with mining companies, with successive governments and countless bureaucrats, to protect the rights of Northern Indigenous communities and support them in the commercial development of their lands – his honour and dignity setting a high standard for the dialogues that took place.

Public accolades for his achievements have included being named Australian of the Year in 1978, made a Member of the Order of Australia for his services to the Aboriginal community in 1985, and inclusion on the National Trust's list of Australian Living Treasures.

In 2008 Galarrwuy Yunupingu led the presentation of another petition, this time to Prime Minister Rudd, asking for formal recognition of self-evident rights to be secured for his people through a process of constitutional reform.

Galarrwuy Yunupingu is recommended for the award of the Doctor of Laws *honoris causa* in recognition of the fire he has lit within Australia: a fire that will blaze ever brighter until Indigenous people secure their self-evident rights to property, their own way of life, economic independence and control over their lives and the future of their children.