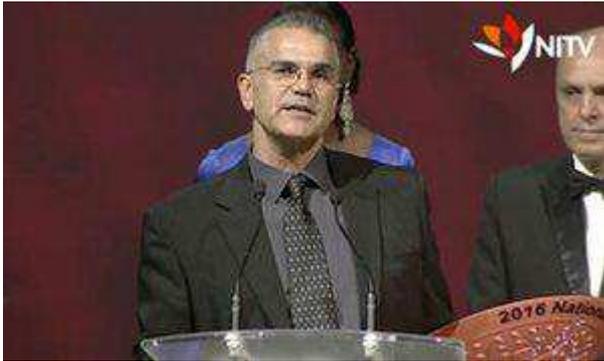


PM should negotiate Indigenous treaty, says Naidoc person of the year Chris Sarra

Indigenous education expert says when political leaders 'are bold enough', his people are ready to speak about a treaty

- [Read Professor Chris Sarra's powerful speech](#)



Professor Chris Sarra, who was named Naidoc person of the year on Friday night, dedicated his award to children and teachers in remote communities. Photograph: NITV

[Calla Wahlquist](#)

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Indigenous education expert Professor Chris Sarra called on the prime minister and to sit down and negotiate a treaty with him in a powerful speech after being named the Naidoc person of the year.

Sarra, who founded the [Stronger Smarter Institute](#) to challenge what he described as systemically low expectations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the Australian education system, was awarded the honour at the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (Naidoc) awards in Darwin on Friday night.

[In a politically charged speech](#), which addressed the high rates of child suicide and poor standard of education offered in remote communities, Sarra said Indigenous Australians were "stronger than we believe and smarter than we know".

"To those of us who feel broken or insufficient, who feel anything but powerful, remember this: of all the billions ever born, it is, we, Australia's First People, we alone share the blood of the world's oldest civilisation," [he said](#).

"And to this end, this note I have a message for Jack Dempsey, mayor of Bundaberg, to Annastacia Palaszczuk, who is the premier of Queensland, and to Malcolm Turnbull, who will probably be the prime minister of Australia.

“I am a descendant of the Gurang Gurang and Taribilang Bunda people.

“And when you are ready, and when you have the courage and you are bold enough, I am ready on behalf of my people and my people are ready to speak with you about a treaty.”

Sarra, who is also a commissioner of the National Rugby League, dedicated the award to children and teachers in remote communities, who he said were “rotting in classrooms that no minister or millionaire would send their children to”.

“To those kids I say this: in more than 500 Stronger Smarter schools nationwide, students just like you are coming to school, staying in school and succeeding,” he said.

“And you are not forgotten ... we will come for you.”

— Jane Caro (@JaneCaro) [July 9, 2016](#)

Congratulations to [@chrissarra](#) He is an educator & supporter of public ed & equity for all kids who I have always unreservedly admired

Wiradjuri woman and author Anita Heiss described the speech as a “Martin Luther King moment”, the same description used for [a speech given by Wiradjuri man and journalist Stan Grant](#) last year.

— Dr Anita Heiss (@AnitaHeiss) [July 8, 2016](#)

. [@chrissarra](#) just gave Australia our [#MartinLutherKing](#) moment. I have never felt more proud / empowered as an Aboriginal woman. [#NAIDOC2016](#)

Turnbull [shut down discussion of a possible treaty](#) during the election campaign, accusing Bill Shorten, who [said during an appearance on the ABC's Q&A program](#) that a treaty could be part of a “post constitutional recognition settlement”, of distracting from the issue of constitutional recognition.

“[Shorten] should have more discipline and more focus on ensuring we maintain support for constitutional recognition rather than introducing other concepts which will, in my view, undermine the prospects of getting the very high level of public support,” [Turnbull said](#).



[Glen Brennan \(@glenbrennan\)](#) [July 8, 2016](#)

[@chrissarra](#) Congrats bro for winning the 2016 NAIDOC Person of the Year! A speech that meant the world to me! [pic.twitter.com/M2UQRJzX1s](#)

— Jasmin Hunter (@jashunter) [July 8, 2016](#)

Congrats [@chrissarra](#) on your [#NAIDOC2016](#) award last night!! You inspire, lead and make a difference. Our kids deserve a great education!

Both major parties support a referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in the preamble to the constitution, but Indigenous leaders, including Labor senator Pat Dodson and Indigenous Advisory Council chairman Warren Mundine, have said a treaty should also be an option and that the two [are not mutually exclusive](#).

Sarra was one of 10 people recognised at the Naidoc awards.

Jasmine Yunupingu collected the award of artist of the year on behalf of her father, singer and Gumatj Yolngu man Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu, who was unwell.

Djaru elder Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik, the [first Indigenous Australian to be a trained nurse and first to gain a doctorate from Harvard University](#), was named female elder of the year, while Dr Robert Francis Isaacs, a Billumum Noongar man and Aboriginal health worker, who helped set up the Clontarf Aboriginal college, was named [male elder of the year](#).

Elijah Douglas, a 19-year-old from Doomadgee, in far north Queensland, of Ganggalidda, Garrwa, Waanyi and Gudanji heritage, was named youth of the year, for his work in youth development programs, in youth parliament, and at the United Nations.

He [told the ABC](#) he had political aspirations, saying: “One of my goals is to become the first Aboriginal prime minister of Australia.”

The other winners were 18-year-old Nyiyaparli, Bardi and Jabbir Jabbir woman Layneisha Sgro, who was named scholar of the year; 18-year-old Miriwoong Gajeroong woman Montana Ah-Won, who was named apprentice of the year; and Brisbane Roar player and Socceroo Jade North, a Biripi man from Taree in New South Wales.

Stephen Page, who has been the artistic director of the [Bangarra Dance Theatre](#) for 25-years, was given the lifetime achievement award. Page is from the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambah nation, in south-east Queensland.