



Renowned Aboriginal elder journeys from the Australian bush to the Vatican to speak about faith, spirituality and reconciliation

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VATICAN CITY – Australia’s Ambassador to the Holy See, Ms Chiara Porro, today announced a series of special events from 29 May to 3 June 2023, focused on reconciliation with Indigenous Australians. The events will coincide with the visit by Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann AM, a renowned Australian Aboriginal elder, educator and artist who is expected to meet with Pope Francis in what will be her first trip from Australia’s ‘outback’ to Rome.

Dr Ungunmerr Baumann trained in a Catholic mission school in her rural community near Darwin and went on to become the first fully-qualified Aboriginal teacher in Australia’s Northern Territory. Throughout her life, she has made an enormous contribution to education, environmental protection and the promotion of Indigenous culture and art, earning her the recognition of Senior Australian of the Year in 2021. Her presence in Rome, which will take place during what Australians refer to as National Reconciliation Week, will add special significance to a year which also marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Australia and the Holy See.

The week’s main event on Tuesday 30 May will be an evening reception at the Vatican Museums, where Dr Ungunmerr Baumann – whose art blends traditional Indigenous elements with Christian themes – will unveil a piece specially commissioned for the anniversary year. On Wednesday 31 May there will be roundtable discussions on inclusive education and a discussion on integral ecology and Indigenous spirituality will take place on Thursday 1 June. The week will conclude with a lecture on the impact of the 1992 ‘Mabo’ judgment, a landmark legal victory for Indigenous rights in Australia. In addition to a private audience with the Pope, Dr Ungunmerr Baumann will also get a chance to meet with senior figures from the Vatican, diplomats, and representatives of Catholic Church networks in Rome.

Cardinal Arthur Roche, Prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, will also mark 50 years since the first Aboriginal Liturgy in Australia, held during the 40th International Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne in 1973, with a mass at Domus Australia in Rome.

In sharing the news, Ambassador to the Holy See, Ms Chiara Porro said:

“I am thrilled to announce Dr Ungunmerr Baumann’s visit to Rome. This will be a unique opportunity to exchange perspectives on many priority issues for both Australia and the Holy See. It will also be an emotive journey by one of our country’s most respected Indigenous leaders, and it stands to be an inspiration and an example that will resonate strongly with Aboriginal communities across Australia. We are grateful to our partners, including Domus Australia and the Australian Catholic University, for their support in facilitating this important visit.”

****ENDS****

NOTE: A press conference with Dr Ungunmerr Baumann is planned for **Monday 29 May at 2pm**, at the Residence of the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, Via di San Pantaleo 66 – 00186 Rome

Members of the media can register on HolySee.Embassy@dfat.gov.au

