

Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC, CBE, DSG

Chancellor, it gives me pleasure to present to you an outstanding candidate for admission to the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa): **Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue**.

This award recognises Dr O'Donoghue's lifetime contribution to the advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights, leading to significant outcomes in health, education, political representation, land rights and reconciliation.

Dr O'Donoghue is a Yankunytjatjara woman from the APY Lands in South Australia. She is a survivor of the Stolen Generations who, along with two of her sisters, was removed from her family at the age of two by the South Australian Aboriginal Protection Board.

The sisters were taken to a church mission home, Colebrook Home for half-caste children in the town of Quorn in the Flinders Ranges, where they were reunited with their eldest sister and only brother who had been taken to the home seven years earlier. She was given the name Lois, a birth date and a birth place. She did not see her mother again for more than 30 years.

Employed as a domestic servant at the age of 16, she was eventually encouraged to work as a nursing aide at the Victor Harbor Hospital. When she applied to complete her nursing training at the Royal Adelaide Hospital she was refused the opportunity because of her Aboriginal heritage. In the stoic fashion for which she would come to be known, Dr O'Donoghue fought the decision, which included personally seeking support from the then Premier of the day, Sir Thomas Playford. The decision was eventually overturned and Dr O'Donoghue became the first Aboriginal person to train as a nurse at the RAH.

After completing her training, she worked at the Royal Adelaide Hospital for another 10 years, eventually progressing to the position of Charge Sister despite ongoing experiences of racism.

During the 1960s, Dr O'Donoghue travelled to India to nurse with the Baptist Overseas Mission, gaining a broader perspective on Indigenous cultures worldwide and cementing her determination to fight for the rights of Indigenous peoples. She campaigned for the recognition of Aboriginal peoples in the 1967 Referendum, and later joined the South Australian branch of the Federal Office of Aboriginal Affairs.

She was eventually appointed to the position of Regional Director, making her responsible for the local implementation of national Aboriginal welfare policy. She was the first woman to hold such a position in a federal department.

Breaking new ground for Indigenous women at the national level, Dr O'Donoghue became the fulltime chairperson of the National Aboriginal Conference in 1976. Building on her passion and growing expertise, she continued to take on senior leadership roles and positions among prominent agencies in Aboriginal affairs.

Between 1990 and 1996, Dr O'Donoghue was the inaugural Chairperson of ATSIC – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission – and won universal admiration for her leadership, tenacity and integrity. A highlight was her pivotal role in the tense and complex negotiations which enabled the creation and passing of Prime Minister Keating's Native Title legislation that rose from the High Court's historic Mabo decision.

In 1992, Dr O'Donoghue was the first Aboriginal person to address the United Nations General Assembly, during the launch of the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Peoples.

In 2000, she played a key advisory role in the lead up to the Sydney Olympic Games as Chairperson of the Sydney Olympic Games National Indigenous Advisory Committee and a member of the Sydney Olympic Games Volunteers Committee. She also carried the torch through Uluru during the Australian leg of the relay.

Dr O'Donoghue has been awarded numerous honours in recognition of her contribution to promoting Aboriginal rights, including: Membership of the Order of Australia (the first Aboriginal woman to become so); Australian of the Year in 1984; Australian National Living Treasure; a Papal honour from Pope John Paul II and investiture as a Dame of the Order of St. Gregory the Great; and the NAIDOC Lifetime Achievement Award. She has also been invested as a Commander of the Order of the British Empire and a Companion of the Order of Australia, and has received honorary doctorates from universities around Australia.

After a lifetime of advocacy and resistance, Dr O'Donoghue continues to promote Aboriginal and Human Rights through a number of avenues. She is a patron of many health, welfare and social justice organisations, including Reconciliation South Australia, the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Centre and the Don Dunstan Foundation.

From 2007, the Don Dunstan Foundation established an annual Lowitja O'Donoghue Oration here in Bonython Hall at the University of Adelaide, with Lowitja herself delivering the very first oration. In 2010, Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research was named the Lowitja Institute in her honour and Dr O'Donoghue remains a patron of the Institute to this day.

Dr O'Donoghue retired from public life in 2008. She turned 89 years of age last month and lives here in Adelaide. Her first authorised biography 'Lowitja' was published in September 2020.

Chancellor, I am pleased to present to you **Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue**, Companion of the Order of Australia, Commander of the Order of the British Empire, Dame of the Order of St Gregory the Great, for admission to the Honorary Degree of Doctor of the University (honoris causa).