THE AUSTRALIAN

Australia Day honours: Adam Goodes: Open your eyes and act

ROSIE LEWIS THE AUSTRALIAN JANUARY 26, 2015 12:00AM

Adam Goodes in Canberra. Picture: Gary Ramage Source: News Corp Australia

ADAM Goodes has called on his fellow Australians to fix the "heartbreak" that comes with excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution, saying the nation can no longer "close its eyes" to a crucial part of its history.

The AFL and Sydney Swans star passed on the Australian of the Year baton yesterday to 2015 recipient Rosie Batty, but was resolute in his commitment to three issues — preventing violence against women, stopping racism and constitutional recognition.

Goodes, 35, has clearly been keeping tabs on what he has achieved in the past 12 months, telling a lunch yesterday that the Recognise campaign for constitutional recognition had grown from 178,000 supporters last February to more than 250,000 today.

"Moving into 2015, I once more ask every Australian to think about what you can do to campaign for this referendum," he said in his final speech as Australian of the Year. "For in putting this right, ours will be a defining and uplifting achievement for every one of us who now calls this nation home. It will make us even more proud to be Australian."

The Adnyamathanha and Narungga man from Wallaroo, 160km northwest of Adelaide, whose mother is a member of the Stolen Generations, urged every Australian to think about what constitutional exclusion says to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

"As Australian of the Year, I have often spoken about the fact our country's Constitution still closes its eyes to the long part of the Australian story that predates British arrival," Goodes said.

"To me, the heartbreak of this Constitution exclusion is that it denies the true span of our country's history to every Australian today, and to all those into the future, and will do so until we fix it. So we need to put this right for ourselves, and for all the generations of young Australians to follow."

As a White Ribbon ambassador, Goodes also challenged men to become educated about domestic violence against women, in a call that has the backing of his Australian of the Year successor.

"It's still a massive challenge for us all but the real challenge lies with us men," Goodes said. "In 2015, our task is to continue to educate and empower men, to realise the role they play in ending violence against women."

Goodes said he initially had no idea where his journey as Australian of the Year would take him but his advice to the 2015 winners was to "just enjoy it".

There was "no doubt" he would be working with the government "in some form" in the future but for now he was content speaking out on his three key issues.

He also wants to play 20 good games for the Swans this season.

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