Unrecognised in Oz, indigenous man creates own country

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Milln Reef (Australia):

Murrumu of Walubara and his son, Thoyo of Walubara, paddled in the clear waters of the Great Barrier Reef. They were 56km off the coast of Australia — or, as Walubara says, what most people refer to as Australia. To him and his followers, the Great Barrier Reef is a part of the Yidinji Territory, a self-declared nation spanning more than 15,539 square kilometres, which Walubara formed in 2014 but to which he says sovereignty was never ceded.

Five years ago, after realising that as an indigenous man he was not recognised by Australia’s constitution, Walubara quit his job as a reporter and renounced his Australian citizenship and former name, Jeremy Geia. He returned his passport, public health care documents and driver’s licence to their government departments, he says, and destroyed his bank cards. “I had assumed that I had true and correct membership inside the Commonwealth of Australia,” Walubara, now 45, recounted writing in the accompanying letters to each government department. “I have made a mistake: I’m no longer eligible for the benefits of your society,” he wrote.

Experts say Walubara has a long road ahead before Australia recognises his claims to sovereignty. But, it bears political weight in a country that has yet to recognise indigenous Australians in its constitution or to make a treaty with the marginalised population. Now, with the recent reelection of a conservative government that has promised a referendum on the issue of constitutional recognition, Walubara, who is Yidinji Territory’s minister of foreign affairs and trade, is pressuring federal leaders to make a treaty with the Yidinji government. A not-for-profit entity, it has a Cabinet of 10 ministers and, so far, 100 citizens (most of whom have both Australian and Yidinji citizenship). NYT NEWS SERVICE
To Murrumu of Walubara (L) and his son Thoyo, the Great Barrier Reef is a part of the Yidinji territory, a self-declared nation spanning more than 15,539 square kilometres in the northeastern part of Australia, which Walubara formed in 2014 but to which he says sovereignty was never ceded.