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# Aborigines might get official recognition

Associated Press

**10** CANBERRA, Australia >> Australia's prime minister, who has won applause for apologizing to Aborigines for past wrongs, has revived plans for a constitutional revision to recognize the country's indigenous people.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd was visiting a remote Outback Aboriginal community when he raised the issue of recognizing Aborigines in Australia's 107-year-old constitution.

"We will ... give attention to detailed, sensitive consultation with indigenous communities

about the most appropriate form and timing of constitutional recognition," Rudd told the Yolngu people in the Northern Territory.

But government opponents warned against giving Aborigines any special privileges under a revised constitution.

"The challenge ... is putting something into the constitution that is meaningful without alienating large sections of the population," opposition Liberal Party indigenous affairs spokesman Tony Abbott told Australian Broadcasting Corp. radio.

"One thing you certainly

couldn't do is give more rights to one group of Australians than to others," he added.

Opposition from Liberal lawmakers would almost certainly ensure that any referendum needed to include Aborigines in the constitution would fail. Referenda that lack bipartisan support almost always fail in Australia.

Australia's constitution does not mention Aborigines. A referendum in 1999 that proposed adding a preamble to the constitution that recognized indigenous people as the first Australians sparked bitter debate about its wording and

ended in defeat.

Australia was colonized in 1788, but the nation's highest court did not recognize until 1992 that Aborigines had been the legal owners of the land when British settlers arrived.

Federal compensation has been paid to some Aborigines for loss of land while native title claims over parts of cities around Australia are still before the courts.

Aborigines are a 400,000-member minority among Australia's 21 million population. They are also the poorest, least healthy and worst-educated ethnic group in Australia.

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