

Keynote — Tangata Whenua Perspective

Hone Harawira

Hone Harawira is the Māori Part Member of Parliament for Te tai Tokerau. He was born in Whangarei and raised in West Auckland where he attended St Stephens School and Auckland University, but learnt most of his skills in the work force and the ranks of the Māori protest movement.

The focus on Treaty settlements has meant a loss of touch with the Treaty itself. The Iwi Leaders Forum is promoting itself as the Treaty partner (rather than the Māori Party) but they seem to be more focused on negotiations and commercial potential than on the Treaty relationship itself.

It is good to know that outside of the iwi forum and political circles there are people, like those at this gathering, for whom the Treaty is still the Treaty.

The Treaty is about on-going relationships between Māori and the Crown. It is not about settlements which have an end date. We are at a special place in time because the Crown thinks that when the settlements process is over the Treaty is done and dusted.

We need to map out the future relationship because when settlements are over the partnership must continue. So we need to get ready for the post-settlement debate. And we need to use the media to help drive the debate and determine its direction.

Current and on-going key issues are water, the constitution, and of course the flag. Consultation on the flag is underway; the meaning of 'water' needs to be settled - and not just as a resource commodity; and there is an agreement between the Māori Party and the National Party for constitutional issues to be considered.

Waitangi Day 2010 could have an international constitutional focus. The way forward may be for someone to draft a constitution and put it out for discussion – rather than wait for government officials to set the terms of the debate. The Treaty should be at the heart of any constitution.

The Treaty is at its most precarious point in its history, and there is a distinct possibility that unless somebody clearly lays down the ongoing importance of the Treaty relationship, its importance to the nation could be lost.

The Crown thinks that 2014 will signal the end of the Treaty – and some iwi leaders think so too. There will always need to be people whose focus is purely the Treaty.

Reasserting the Treaty as a document of partnership needs to be the focus of our work over the next 10 to 15 years.

Notes by Deborah Radford and Jen Margaret