

The Treaty Today: 6 February 2007

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Sacred Covenant, Simple Nullity, Disputed Document, Respected Relationship

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa
Greetings to you all.

I honour this whenua, and this marae, where nga rangatira met 167 years ago to talk about a proposed treaty with the English Queen, and made decisions that allowed English people, my ancestors among them, and other tauiwi, to settle in Aotearoa.

I grieve for the broken promises, the theft and deceit, the warfare and confiscations which followed; and mourn for those who have died in the struggle for justice.

I acknowledge this wharenuī, and these people - you who have kept alive the promises of the Treaty, and continue to challenge those who hold power to respect the rangatiratanga of their Treaty partner.

And I rejoice in the opportunity to be here today, to share some thoughts about the progress we are making as a nation.

The challenges which continue to face our country are exciting ones:

How do we work together to ensure that more and more people in Aotearoa learn to delight in belonging to a Treaty-based nation?

How can we strengthen the spirit of trust, and respect for rangatiratanga, which the Treaty embodies?

How can we most effectively pressure the government of the day to exemplify good kawanatanga:

- to hasten the process of acknowledging Treaty breaches and making restitution
- to acknowledge the rangatiratanga of Maori and support the growth of hapu and iwi self-management
- to share resources fairly
- to work with Treaty partners to protect the people and the land of Aotearoa against the dangers of globalisation – especially against national and international greed?

My own journey towards commitment to these goals has been relatively recent; like so many of my generation, I grew up knowing nothing of our shared history except a few whitewashed stories.

And for various reasons, this is the first time I have been to Waitangi on Waitangi Day. I will reflect on three decades of my journey – Waitangi Day 1977, 1987, 1997 - because my learning journey is one many Pakeha are beginning or engaged in.

Thirty years ago, in 1977, I thought that Maori had ceded sovereignty at Waitangi in exchange for the benefits of European civilisation, and that was why we celebrated

Waitangi Day. In my daily life, the treaty was, as Justice Pendergrast put it, “a simple nullity”.

By 1987 my understandings, perceptions, indeed my whole life, had been radically changed, through my experiences as principal of AGGS. I saw the Treaty as an English excuse for colonial land theft, and Waitangi Day as an occasion for protest, my role to support the activists on my staff at the time in any ways needed. Through Treaty action in 1985 I had met Tanya Cumberland, who was at that time being marginalised in her senior position in the Department of Social Welfare because of her challenging work on institutional racism and sexism in the department, and we had become partners.

Both of us acknowledge the role that Maori played in changing our understanding – we had been challenged by experts during the late 1970s and early 80s, especially some well-known to you all: Titewhai Harawira, Donna Awatere, Ripeka Evans, and the late Hana Jackson and Dame Mira Szazy. We acknowledge also the work of Pakeha treaty and anti-racism workers, especially those in the NCC Programme on Racism, ACORD, the Waitangi Action Committee, Project Waitangi and Network Waitangi, some of whom are here today. Many of these people not only challenged our understanding and informed our thinking, but also supported us personally during the changes demanded of us.

So by 1987 we had come to see the Treaty as a “disputed and dishonoured document” – a source of disagreement between many Maori and Pakeha, to be resolved through knowledge, legal process and restitution.

But we had also begun to see the possibility of a nation based on a new kind of respectful relationship between tangata whenua and tangata tiriti.

Also in 1987 we met Nganeko Minhinnick, and began to hear some of the stories from her rohe: the mining of burial grounds at Maioro, the pollution of the Manukau, the confiscations of land, the felling and burning of forests, the draining of waterways, the burning of waka...We learnt to feel the pain of the past, rage at the present, and the passion to work towards healing and restoring resources, towards shaping a respectful future.

The challenges had moved us, intellectually. The stories moved us, emotionally – and literally, in 1992, to Awhitu, to work on the land, in a rural community, in ways which showed our commitment to the Treaty partnership. We consulted Ngaati Te Ata before buying land in their rohe, and shared with them dreams of reclaiming and replanting native bush, protecting coastlines and waterways, and growing organic food,

Waitangi Day in 1997, then, was spent as it has been ever since we moved to Awhitu, at the Ngaati Te Ata Achievers' Day at Tahuna Pa: celebrating the achievements of the rangatahi in education, culture, sport and service; honouring elders, and informing those who attend about issues of iwi development; sharing food and whanau fun.

But on Waitangi Day 1997 I had also just begun the process of trying to revive one of the schools destroyed by the policies of the then National government; I was learning at first hand the terrible social consequences of the 1984-90 Labour government economic reforms, and their further entrenchment by National during the 1990s.

I am enraged each time I hear Pakeha wondering why there are violent young people, disfunctional families and gangs in many parts of the Aotearoa – particularly those places where economic change had the most brutal effects on livelihoods. Such commentators either have no memory, or they simply refuse to make the connections.

Count back to the birth and growth years of those committing the most brutal and dangerous acts in society today, and we find that they grew up in homes destroyed by unemployment, poverty, drugs and mind-mangling mass media.

Who introduced alcohol and cannabis – and more recently party drugs and P – to this country? Who built the McDonalds and Pizza Huts and rash of other fast-food chains selling fatty and chemical-filled foods to our families? Who makes – and who sells – and who buys the violent pornography on video and in cinemas, on videos and in computer games – and indeed, who continues to make most of the profit from all these industries of destruction?

Until those who peddle or permit poisons in our society are made to take responsibility for their consequences, and put their money into mopping up the mess they have made – and until we stand up as a nation and say we're sick of filth and toxins in the land where we raise our children, we will continue to grow stunted, mutated children who have not yet learnt to love or respect others.

To destroy the economic base of a people – and thereby to marginalise them from good education and community participation – is an act of brutality, and a deep breach of trust. How can children whose families are broken and whose schools are sabotaged begin to learn respect, or love? If we really want to prevent the abuse of children and the random acts of violence damaging our society, we must invest in surrounding young people and their families with loving care and respect, so they can learn that they have a valued place in our world, and learn in turn to value those around them.

A fine starting point would be a government apology for the second great dishonoring of the Treaty – the harm done to Maori without consultation in the 1980s and 90s - by arrogant decision-makers. And then a huge speeding-up of investment in Maori self-management – together with a pledge from both major political parties to behave with more respect towards each other, towards Maori, and towards all people, in future.

The miracle is the tenacity of human hope, and human resilience – the huge numbers of Maori families and others who have resisted the worst of colonisation, who care passionately for their children's well-being, who have set up and paid for their own kohanga reo and kura kaupapa Maori. Through our own on-going relationship with Ngaati Te Ata, as well as through the groups who visit us on our land, and our other activities, we rejoice in the growing strength of Maori, and the consequent emergence of new strengths in our nation.

So how do we see the state of the nation today, in 2007?

Last year's Pakeha speakers covered many of the issues we share.

- Bob Scott talked about the need for a new mindset among Pakeha, an openness to acknowledging our ignorance, to learning, and to developing a covenanted

relationship with tangata whenua as envisaged by many of those who signed the Treaty originally, and their descendents

- David James spoke of the importance of our social groups and networks in nurturing relationships of trust, so we can better resist the disintegrative forces of abuse and greed threatening us from within as well as from without
- Betsan Martin described the possibilities of using co-governance for environmental management as a way of implementing the Treaty relationship in an ethically effective and responsible way, to the benefit of us all
- And Jane Kelsey described the continuing insistence by successive settler governments that they alone may exercise sovereignty in Aotearoa, and their abuses of power, particularly the continuing transfer of many of our rights and resources off-shore through treaties with other nations

All speakers acknowledged that some progress has been made towards honouring the Treaty; all agreed that we have a vast distance to travel together before we have a genuinely Treaty-based nationhood, based on whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga.

I want to follow last year's themes by considering some ideas for continuing practical action by tangata tiriti in cooperation with tangata whenua I shall focus just on three areas –**personal action, public education, and political decisions.**

Personal action

First, in our personal lives, the work of changing the mind-set of the nation continues in day-to-day talk with neighbours and colleagues, friends and relations. There are many people of goodwill in Aotearoa who want a nation based on trust and respect – a majority, I suggest – but only a minority are willing to challenge, face-to-face, those who make stupid, prejudiced remarks about Maori or the Treaty, or generally racist, sexist, or homophobic comments.

Too often, objection to rude and ignorant remarks is sneered at as mere "political correctness". Challenging ignorance and fear demands that we have the courage to be PC - personally courteous, and publicly challenging and courageous. We all need to become better at speaking out assertively. To remain silent in the face of prejudice or injustice is to collaborate in maintaining an untrustworthy and disrespectful society.

Public education

In the public arena, including the media and the education system, there has been a shift for the better:

At least now we have sensitive articles by Peter Sharples, Rawiri Taonui, Hone Harawira, Tapu Misa and others given some prominence in newspapers, more Maori reporters, and many thoughtful programmes on National Radio. Maori magazines, radio and television have brought a whole new positive dimension to our lives. Many schools are working to become genuinely inclusive, through programmes such as Te Kotahitanga. And the move to standards-based assessment and NCEA is helping to dislodge the class-based system and replace it with genuine recognition of learning – which can only advantage Maori and others formerly excluded.

But perhaps we need to pay more attention to the internet and other methods of communication. There are excellent resources available on the internet – any quick search for “Waitangi” or “Treaty of Waitangi” will find masses of archival and documentary material. But my own experience, as a learner and a teacher, shows we need lots more positive Treaty stories – the films and videos which will move people. The huge response to *Whale Rider* was partly because it met that hunger of the human spirit for stories with happy endings.

Even simple talking-head videos where local people tell their stories – Treaty issues, and Treaty resolutions, new partnerships and alliances, old grievances aired and resolved – can be immensely useful in generating discussion at meetings in school, church and community groups.. And maybe broadsheets with a key message, a couple of people telling their stories, and a picture or two – could be distributed through supermarkets, and by email. Or short, punchy books could be produced like the six-pack book for six dollars which sold so widely during last year’s book month – or maybe we could persuade some businesses to print items on cereal packets and drink bottles...I’m talking about the need to bring images and words of hope, messages of trust and cooperation, to the young people who need them so badly – and the older ones too.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a palaeontologist, theologian and priest who wrote “The Phenomenon of Man”, first published in 1955, described the stages of evolution of this planet, and named the emerging phase as the “noosphere” – the development of a network of shared knowledge around the planet. Whether Christian or not, we can all now surely see the vital importance of ensuring that internet – and our whole information-saturated society - is infused with, and eventually transformed by, the portrayal of what is positive and good, not drowned in images of negativity and evil.

Schools and other learning centres...I could spend an hour or two describing the inadequacies of the present education system. Sufficient today to say the Ministry of Education’s draft curriculum statement omitted mention of the Treaty, and failed to challenge all schools to affirm and model our bicultural heritage. We must ensure, all of us, that the revised draft remedies those deficiencies. Pakeha parents and grandparents need to keep up a barrage of letters to the Ministry about this.

But I also celebrate those learning centres, most of them early childhood centres, kohanga reo, and state primary schools, along with a few kura kaupapa Maori and secondary schools, that are exemplars of inclusive communities committed to Sustainable learning, Ethical behavior, Environmental responsibility and Democracy based on respect for rangatiratanga – I call them the SEEDs of our future nationhood., and I hope many more will be planted and nurtured in the next year.

Political decisions

And what political decisions do we need most urgently?

I think it would be worthwhile for Pakeha Treaty workers to seek a commitment from all parties to the establishment of a Nationhood Commission as recommended by the Maori Party. It is time for debate on the state of our nation, a debate which enables all citizens, especially our young people, to have their say on the kind of nation they want.

Both Labour and National could also surely see the usefulness of committing more resources to the resolving of Treaty issues – and could perhaps be persuaded that the Office of Treaty Settlements is in need of a good shake-up, and should come under the control of the Waitangi Tribunal. What's the use of an office that obstructs settlements by making up its own rules on representation, on iwi boundaries, on which Maori consultants will be listened to, and which keeps changing the rules during negotiations?

MMP makes it possible for smaller parties to have a significant voice. The Maori Party and the Green Party are already modelling higher standards of parliamentary behaviour, and offering more good sense and practical suggestions for a better nation than all the others put together – maybe in the next election voters will recognise that by giving the the Maori Party and the Greens sufficient seats to keep the bigger parties honest.

As for climate change – now there is national and international acceptance of what environmentalists, both Maori and tauiwi, have known always, perhaps we can hope for some genuine initiatives to reduce consumption, increase protection for our land and waterways, and use alternative energy sources. In the meantime, there is nothing to stop every marae, every school and every church in Aotearoa having its own solar and wind power, its own orchards and vegetable gardens, its own greywater and recycling systems. Necessity may compel such changes throughout society sooner than we think – and those who already model what is possible will be keenly sought for their expertise..

Conclusion

When I become enraged or depressed about the state of our nation, I remind myself of the vast difference between New Zealand, the British Colony I grew up in, and Aotearoa, the richly diverse fabric of colour, culture, debate and decision-making I now enjoy. New Zealand has become a proudly Pacific country, for those of us who celebrate the heritages of tangata whenua and tangata tiriti.

The Treaty is no longer for most New Zealanders a simple nullity, nor merely a disputed document. It models for us a respected relationship – and we have much to gain if, as a nation, we choose to ensure it is seen by all our citizens as a sacred covenant – a living pledge to be the best nation we can, based on trust, and respect, and the rangatiratanga of all our people.

I am deeply grateful to all of you who continue to work to make such a nation possible.
Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui
Kia ora koutou