

**PRESS RELEASE IN REGARD TO PAPER BY ELIZABETH RATA**

**ON BEHALF OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR MAORI AND  
INDIGENOUS EDUCATION (IRI) AND TE ARATIATIA (MAORI EDUCATION, THE  
UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND.**

Tuesday, July 27, 2004

The recent attack by Elizabeth Rata on Kaupapa Maori developments highlights a disturbing trend of racism being disguised as public debate. Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Education, Dr Leonie Pihama, states that the comments by Elizabeth Rata where couched within an "almost unintelligible academic language" do in fact merely reflect the Don Brash position that Maori language and culture have little significance in this country. Dr Pihama states "Elizabeth Rata has used her academic position to promote a totally uninformed view of Kaupapa Maori and Maori Education. The 'research' she purports to have undertaken is seriously devoid of any input by Maori in the sector and rehashes a range of articles and reports that have already been challenged".

Claims by Rata that Kaupapa Maori is 'anti-democratic and fundamentalist' have no substance in that all Kaupapa Maori initiatives have been open for others, including Elizabeth Rata, to be involved. Furthermore, Dr Pihama highlights that the claim that Kaupapa Maori is 'intellectually and scientifically flawed' is one that Rata fails to verify. Dr Pihama notes that "Kaupapa Maori initiatives are grounded within a strong Maori intellectual, cultural, spiritual and scientific base. Just because Maori knowledge is not viewed in the same way as western knowledge by people like Elizabeth Rata, does not make it any less robust."

As Director of IRI, Dr Pihama advocates a Kaupapa Maori approach to research and in fact Maori authors, Dr Graham Smith, Dr Linda Smith and Dr Fiona Cram, referred to by Rata in her paper are closely involved with the Institute. A Kaupapa Maori approach acknowledges clearly that matauranga Maori is a valid and highly complex knowledge system that offers a unique way of analyzing issues for Maori both historically and in contemporary times. The underlying assumptions are clearly stated, it is about validating a cultural knowledge base and approach to research and education. Dr Pihama contends that where Kaupapa Maori clearly states up front its intentions, Elizabeth Rata does not afford the public with the same, rather she operates under a guise of academic scrutiny when there is in fact much more going on. Dr Pihama states; "Elizabeth Rata is a Pakeha woman who has had major personal differences with Maori people working in Kaupapa Maori initiatives and as such I seriously question her intentions. Hiding her own intentions under a claim that she is seeking subjective scrutiny is quite unacceptable, as it denies her own self-interest."

Maori Academic, Jenny Lee, also questions Rata's criticism of Kaupapa Maori as promoting primordial ethnic divisions. Lee, who teaches in the area of Race, Ethnicity and Education, notes that such statements show an ignorance of Kaupapa Maori and a limited understanding of ethnicity. Lee states "definitions of ethnicity are widely debated, complex and range from primordial to political explanations of ethnic formation. Most theorists, however, acknowledge that ethnicity is usually influenced by both primordial and political elements, that is, culture (and knowledge) is protected and passed down to the next generation while simultaneously responding to challenges in the contemporary context." Ms Lee contends that the promotion of ethnic cultural traditions does not mean that there is a non-acceptance of ethnic fluidity, to the contrary Kaupapa Maori acknowledges that as a result of colonisation Maori are as diverse as any other group. Furthermore Lee states "Strengthening Maori ethnicity, whether it be primordial or political, is about asserting and exploring our indigeneity, our position as tangata whenua, that is not creating divisions. There is no reason for Elizabeth Rata or any other person to be threatened by that".

**ENDS**

Contact:

Dr Leonie Pihama

0272263217

Ms Jenny Lee

0272723900