

TE RUNANGA WHAKAWHANAUNGA I NGA HAHI O AOTEAROA

(MAORI COUNCIL OF CHURCHES)



PRESS RELEASE: TE RUNANGA ASKS MAORI PEOPLE NOT TO VOTE

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Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga i Nga Hahi o Aotearoa, the Maori Council of Churches, has decided to intervene in the coming election by asking Maori people not to vote. It will be launching a media campaign to this effect through newspaper and television advertising in the coming week.

"This decision has not been taken lightly" said the Runanga secretary, Rob Cooper. "The main reasons for this intervention are to re-focus attention upon the moral issues surrounding the Treaty of Waitangi and to encourage Maori people in a common purpose based upon the Treaty right of Te Tino Rangatiratanga. In this 150th commemorative year, it is vital for Maori to stand up for their Treaty rights. Not voting is an excellent, lawful and peaceful way to engage in passive resistance. At the same time it allows Maori to demonstrate that they will no longer co-operate with injustice."

"The Treaty is a covenant, requiring moral and ethical standards of behaviour and co-operation between Maori and the Crown. However, it is obvious to Te Runanga that there are no systems available to Iwi which enable them to conduct frank and robust dialogue with the Crown, upon the basis of equality."

"Therefore, there is a desperate need to get this relationship right for 'no nation divided against itself can stand'. This is particularly true for Maori who are being asked, once more, to divide their loyalties upon party political lines. What is needed is not more of the same worn out political patronage which keeps Maori locked into dependency, but a new system of relationships based firmly on the moral rights and ethical duties inherent in the Treaty of Waitangi. We need to lift Treaty issues out of the quagmire of political patronage and on to the high ground of diplomatic dialogue."

According to Mr Cooper it would not be difficult to establish a constitutional forum to resolve Treaty issues such as Te Tino Rangatiratanga through dialogue and negotiation. "All that is required" he said "is for politicians to accept that it is necessary. We would be very happy to contribute a draft proposal for just such a process."

"As a first step of bringing this about, Maori people are being asked not to vote. Instead they are invited to sign a Te Tino Rangatiratanga register, which is already in circulation and which has been produced in close co-operation with the Kia Mohio Kia Marama Trust. This register is offered for signing to all Maori whanau, hapu and iwi organisations, and to all people of goodwill."

Rob Cooper said, "Te Runanga enjoys excellent cross-cultural relationships with a host of organisations, both within Aotearoa and Internationally. We are inviting all people who support Treaty-based justice to sign the register and have been heartened by the Pakeha responses and the support we have received from our local and international ecumenical partners."

Mr Cooper added that the general state of Maori political powerlessness had been discussed ecumenically both locally and internationally for over a decade.

"However, during the past 3 years Te Runanga has concentrated upon a number of locally based options. Therefore, at its 1990 Annual General Meeting held at the Presbyterian Marae at Ohope in March, plans were made to intervene in this year's election. After further analysis the final decision to ask Maori people not to vote was made at the June meeting held at the Anglican Marae church in Mangere.

The news media are invited to a press conference at the Church Offices, 1st floor, 5 Short Street in Newmarket, Auckland at 1p.m. on Sunday, 9 September where there will be an opportunity to question representatives of each of the member churches of Te Runanga and to preview the television advertisement placed in the Holmes show for Monday, 10 September.

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