

TE RUNANGA WHAKAWHANAUNGA I NGA HAHĪ O AOTEAROA

(MAORI COUNCIL OF CHURCHES)



9 September 1990

Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga i Nga Hahi was founded in 1982 out of a deep desire for greater Maori autonomy at an ecumenical level among Maori members of the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Each member church has up to 6 representatives who reflect a diversity of geographical areas, iwi affiliations and genders.

The ecumenical-styled welcome offered by the Maori church leaders of Te Runanga member churches, plus Ringatu and Ratana leaders, to His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1986 symbolised the strength of Maori solidarity which rises above denominationalism.

Te Runanga's predecessor was the Maori section of the National Council of Churches. The formation of Te Runanga enabled complete Maori autonomy for its members, while also providing for ongoing fraternal relations with the N.C.C.

Simultaneously, Te Runanga established international links in its own right with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the World Council of Churches (WCC) and through various Catholic organisations. There is a Te Runanga Commissioner on the W.C.C. Programme to Combat Racism, and representatives on various C.C.A. committees. Earlier this year the Christian Conference of Asia admitted both the Maori and Pakeha ecumenical organisations into full joint membership. This is a tribute to the unique bi-cultural relationship engendered in the churches of Aotearoa.

At the same time Te Runanga has supported and funded four annual ecumenical Hui Wahine for Maori Christian women. From their ranks many Maori women have represented Te Runanga and Maori women's opinions at numerous international forums.

Te Runanga has played a significant, but low-key, role in reclaiming Maori Treaty rights in the 1980s. In 1983, in response to a direct request from Sir James Henare, Te Runanga accepted responsibility to organise a national Hui on Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This major hui was held at Turangawaewae Marae in October 1984 and reaffirmed solid Maori support for the Treaty. Te Runanga published the record of the Hui in "He Korero Mo Waitangi". The remits of the Hui were presented to the 1984 Labour Government, in association with representatives of the wide range of Maori groups who had joined in the organisation of the Hui.

Te Runanga and the four Maori Members of Parliament jointly hosted a follow-up Hui at Waitangi on 6 February 1985. This Hui reaffirmed the remits from Ngaruawahia. Throughout 1985 Te Runanga was engaged in a number of working parties aimed at Maori economic and social justice.

However, by 1987 it was evident to Te Runanga that Maori voters were deeply disillusioned with government policies. It predicted a low turn out, which was later dismissed as "apathy".

Since that time Te Runanga has co-funded with the New Zealand Maori Council another Hui on political representation and has continued to run low-key programmes on social analysis. These are aimed at the development of Maori critical consciousness and have provided a rich field for gathering the "flax roots" opinions of ordinary Maori folk.

It is against this background that Te Runanga reached its decision at Ohope in March and at Mangere in June of this year to intervene in the 1990 election by asking Maori people, and all people of goodwill, not to vote and instead to sign a Tino Rangatiratanga Register.