

Oral Statement: National Iwi Chairs Forum (Pou Tikanga) and the University of Auckland's Aotearoa Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Law

Delivered by Claire Charters

Topic: Panel on National Human Rights Institutions

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Tēnā koutou kātoa.

My name is Claire Charters. I am from the nation of Ngāti Whakae. I speak on behalf of Pou Tikanga of the National Tribal Nations' Chairs Forum of New Zealand and the Aotearoa Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Law.

The National Tribal Nations' Chairs Forum is made up of leaders from over 80 Māori nations who carry mandates from their peoples. Our Pou Tikanga collective ensures that tikanga is embedded across all areas of our decision-making, including in our engagements with the Government and international mechanisms.

The close relationship between the National Tribal Nations' Chairs' Forum and the Human Rights Commission is an important model for partnerships between National Human Rights Institutions and Indigenous Peoples.

Together we work together to promote the Government's compliance with the Declaration. For example:

- Co-hosted constitutional conferences on the rights of Māori;
- Co-hosted the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous peoples' informal academic visit 2024;
- Co-hosted the 2019 country engagement of the Expert Mechanism in 2019 to support the development of a national plan of action;
- Worked in partnership to develop that national plan of action. The Government unilaterally cancelled that process;
- We coordinate on an annual report to the Expert Mechanism on New Zealand's performance against the Declaration and on submissions to the various human rights treaty bodies; and
- The National Tribal Nations' Chairs Forum and the Human Rights Commission together appoint the Rongomau Taketake – the Indigenous Rights Governance Partner – which is a work around for the Government's refusal to appoint an Indigenous Rights Commissioner. It was a role I was fortunate to hold.

The support provided by New Zealand's Human Rights Commission to the National Tribal Nations' Chairs' Forum is crucial in a political context where:

- Coalition partners in New Zealand's current Government expressly reject the Declaration; and
- The Government has not responded to a request by the Expert Mechanism for a follow-up country engagement.

Just this week New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister described the Special Rapporteur's letter expressing concern with New Zealand's current policies diminishing our rights as "an affront to New Zealand's sovereignty" and "offensive".

Statements like this from New Zealand's Deputy Prime Minister, who describes himself as upholding the right to equality, and from a state that portrays itself as supportive of human rights, is deeply troubling. It undermines the international human rights structure generally. It reduces New Zealand's authority to call out human rights abuse globally.

Further, the Deputy Prime Minister has breached the requirement of confidentiality of Special Rapporteur's correspondence with governments.

This is the so-called "hottest" news item at the moment. The Deputy Prime Minister has been reprimanded for his response but the Prime Minister has simultaneously confirmed that he agrees with the content of the Deputy Prime Minister's letter.

This is an international embarrassment.

The National Tribal Nations' Chairs' Forum and the University of Auckland's Centre for Indigenous Peoples and the Law will work together with the Human Rights Commission to address this breach on international human rights processes.

Tēnā koutou kātoa.