

Friday, 9 August 2024

Statement for World Indigenous Peoples Day

Today we celebrate the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. This year's theme focuses on the right to voluntary isolation and initial contact of indigenous peoples.

As a basic timeline of European record in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the first known European contact (Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman) with the indigenous Māori, Tangata Whenua of Aotearoa can be dated back to 1642, denoting that Māori, Tangata Whenua had settled and flourished for 300-400 years in Aotearoa before initial contact with Europeans, and would spend another 127 years in voluntary isolation on the islands we now recognise as Aotearoa, New Zealand prior to the arrival of James Cook in 1769.

These historical accounts of contact will not include the right to voluntary isolation or humane protocols for initial contact with the indigenous Māori, Tangata Whenua. This timeframe predates the cause and effect of discrimination, ethnic cleansing, introduction of foreign diseases or epidemics, assimilation, indoctrination or land confiscation. Likewise, it is long before any European or British legal rights or obligations, titles or protections for indigenous races could evolve into existence.

170 years would pass after the initial contact between British and Māori, when Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi would be established and signed in 1840. Its many interpretations, translations and expectations for bi-cultural relations and dialogue will continue for over a century thereafter. The ripples and ramifications of Te Tiriti through agreement, argument and conflict continue to be felt to this day.

In recognition of the principle of *'tino rangatiratanga'* and the inherent rights of Māori as the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, New Zealand we look to uphold the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) that underscores the inherent dignity of every person, but especially recognises and respects Māori autonomy, self-determination, sovereignty and cultural identity.

We particularly seek solidarity with Tangata Whenua, Māori and will continue to advocate and address these historical and present injustices by exercising justice and peace that resonates with the Māori pursuit of rangatiratanga, ensuring fair treatment and the protection of their rights.¹ We recognise that:

We all need to know our history and the different legacies it has left to Māori and Tau Iwi. In many parts of the world, indigenous peoples face the loss of land, of

¹ Archives New Zealand. (April 2024). *Te Tiriti o Waitangi me tōna huanga mai The Treaty of Waitangi and how it happened.* <https://www.archives.govt.nz/discover-our-stories/the-treaty-of-waitangi/the-treaty-of-waitangi-and-how-it-happened>

language, of culture and identity. In the Treaty of Waitangi, we find the moral basis for our presence in Aotearoa New Zealand and a vision that sets this country apart. We hold in our hands a great treasure - the opportunity to create a society that truly honours the rights of its indigenous people.

We have an opportunity to heal wounds that have been present for too long. The Treaty of Waitangi was built on respect for persons and respect for their diversity. There is a way forward. It lies in continued goodwill and open recognition that there are many paths that we as a nation can embark on as we strive to realise the bicultural foundation of our society. Together, we must find the way which meets the demands of justice and of solidarity among peoples.²

We acknowledge and respect a conveniently overlooked truth, that the "indigenous people of our country", and the "first occupants" of the whenua are Māori, Tangata Whenua and "have the right to land, and political organisation which would allow them to preserve their cultural identity".³ As a Commission, Diocese and Church we strive to advocate and commit to a more bi-cultural society, nation and Church.

We further this belief and commitment with the words of Pope Saint John Paul II who claimed: **"It is as Māori that the Lord calls you, it is as Māori that you belong to the Church, the one Body of Christ"**.⁴ In today's lectionary Psalm taken from the book of Deuteronomy, we also read: "Surely, the Lord shall do justice for his people." We are all God's people, and we expect justice.

May we continue to strive for justice and peace with humble appreciation of all aspects of life, and remain tika to God's Word, the principle of 'tino rangatiratanga', and the taonga of our own hearts as Tangata Whenua, Tangata Tiriti, and Hāhi Katorika by removing and healing injustices wherever known or observed.

I runga i te tika me te rangimarie | In justice and peace.

Statement prepared and issued on behalf of Bishop Steve Lowe's Justice and Peace Commission Catholic Diocese of Auckland

Kathleen Ngaronoa Card

Executive Secretary

² New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. (September 1995). *A Statement on the Treaty of Waitangi in Today's Perspective*. <https://www.catholic.org.nz/about-us/bishops-statements/a-statement-on-the-treaty-of-waitangi-in-todays-perspective/>

³ New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference. (August 2017). *Te Tiriti o Waitangi – The Treaty of Waitangi "In the Treaty of Waitangi, we find the moral basis for our presence in Aotearoa New Zealand and a vision that sets this country apart."* <https://www.catholic.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Te-Tiriti-O-Waitangi-The-Treaty-of-Waitangi.pdf#:~:text=They%20acknowledged%20that%20through%20the,and%20in%20the%20Church%20itself.>

⁴ Ibid.