



Tēnā koe Madam Chair,

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā wai, e ngā maunga, e ngā hau, e  
karapoti i te whare rūnanga nō ngā tōpito o te ao - tēnā koutou, tēnā  
koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.

These words are meant as a greeting to all who have gathered  
remotely today, from all places and corners of the world.

In 2019, New Zealand was privileged to be one of the first countries  
to be visited by the Expert Mechanism. As a country that has  
engaged with the Mechanism since its inception, it was a pleasure  
to welcome some of its members to our shores, to gain a much  
closer understanding and appreciation of their work, and to benefit  
from their expertise.

The world has changed immensely since this visit, with the tragedy  
of COVID-19 impacting us all. This has included the significant  
negative impact of the pandemic on the health, well-being and  
livelihoods of indigenous peoples.

A range of United Nations bodies and agencies, including the Chair  
of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the UN Special  
Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Expert  
Mechanism, have called for the protection of the health and  
wellbeing of indigenous peoples.

They have stressed that equality and non-discrimination must guide  
COVID-19 responses, and indigenous peoples should take part in  
the design, implementation and evaluation of these responses. They  
have strongly advocated for indigenous-led initiatives as the way  
forward.

The Expert Mechanism's visit to New Zealand was initiated by the

Aotearoa Independent Monitoring Mechanism and the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. We acknowledge their important advocacy role and their commitment to engaging with the New Zealand Government and international bodies on indigenous issues.

The inclusive approach taken by the Expert Mechanism and its Secretariat during the visit ensured all parties were involved in both the planning and the visit. Both the process and advice provided have encouraged a spirit of partnership between the government, Māori and other stakeholders.

The Expert Mechanism's engagement with government officials, enabled us to share the government's awareness and understanding of Māori views, and our desire to address indigenous issues. We were pleased to be able to demonstrate our openness and commitment by having the Independent Monitoring Mechanism and the Human Rights Commission attend the sessions between the Expert Mechanism and government representatives.

The visit to New Zealand in April 2019 was very timely. In March 2019, our Cabinet agreed that the Minister for Māori Development would lead a process to develop a national plan of action on New Zealand's progress towards the objectives of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

During the country visit, the Expert Mechanism provided valuable technical advice to New Zealand to support the drafting of a strategy or plan and on an appropriate engagement strategy to undertake this work.

Subsequent to the visit, a technical working group was established to look at the options for engagement and what form a Declaration plan might take. The group reported its advice on next steps for the development of a plan in late 2019.

Further progress on the development of a Declaration plan was

slowed in 2020, due to resources being prioritised to respond to COVID-19. It is time now to progress this work and develop a plan that measures our progress in advocating for Māori in real and meaningful ways. This is an important conversation for New Zealand to have as a nation.

Earlier this month, the Minister for Māori Development announced the next steps for developing a Declaration plan. The first step is targeted engagement with key iwi, or tribal organisations, and other significant Māori organisations to inform the process for developing the plan, and the second step is wider public consultation once we have a draft Declaration plan.

There is a strong desire in Aotearoa New Zealand to keep pushing forwards towards the country we want to be, towards the aspirations held by both the government and Māori for a future of harmonious and cooperative relations.

The Declaration plan is expected to identify specific actions that can make real progress on the aspirations of Māori as the indigenous peoples of our country, and provide transparency about what is being done. We don't have all the answers yet and this process is iterative, but we are entering into this conversation in partnership to ensure that we can identify solutions that will work and are consistent with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, or, the Treaty of Waitangi.

Our aim is to develop a draft Declaration plan by the end of this year. The Advisory Note produced by the Expert Mechanism is helping to inform the ongoing engagement between government, Māori and the Expert Mechanism, as we undertake this process.

The second step is to undertake wider public consultation in 2022. Following this wider consultation, we will look to confirm a final plan by the end of 2022.

The second part of this process is when we will hear from all New Zealanders. Ultimately, we need to hear the views of everyone, their

thoughts, their ideas, their dreams and their aspirations, before we map out a pathway which shows us how, as a country, we will get there.

This is a slow process but we want to get it right, and make sure that we bring the entire the country with us, as we work on issues of importance to Māori, in partnership with Māori.

We look forward to our ongoing relationship with the Expert Mechanism as we continue down this important path.

No reira, tēnā tātou katoa.