

EMRIP

13<sup>th</sup> session

30 November to 4 December 2020

Statement of the Independent Iwi Monitoring Mechanism  
Delivered by: Margaret Mutu (Chair)

Greetings to all participants.

This statement addresses 6 of EMRIP'S questions on the impact of COVID-19 on Indigenous peoples' rights. Further information can be found in our annual report.

Regarding the **main challenges** faced by Indigenous peoples during the pandemic.

Key challenges included that, while there was some government engagement with Māori, Māori were not sufficiently involved in key decisions.

In the absence of a constitution affirming te Tiriti o Waitangi, government structures are ill-equipped to act in compliance with te Tiriti. Systems change is needed to enable Māori to exercise authority and lead solutions, and for the state to share power and resources.

Regarding the impact on Indigenous people's **economic, social and cultural life**.

Māori are hit harder in recessions, and are slower to recover. Many of us work in vulnerable industries, such as tourism and hospitality – where Māori women in particular have been severely impacted. Education, food security, access to medicines, phone and internet have been key areas of concern.

Cultural impacts have also been significant. We have adapted tikanga Māori (law and customary practices) for example, by closing marae (community institutions) and changing tangihanga (funeral protocols).

Yet government decisions – such as funeral restrictions – assumed that government has authority to make decisions regarding tikanga Māori.

Regarding the impact on **indigenous persons with disabilities**.

COVID-19 highlighted the government's inability to disseminate real-time information in disability-specific formats. Accessibility issues occurred with the government's COVID-19

website and app. These information barriers were addressed by Māori disabled-led organisations.

Regarding **good practices** in alleviating the effects of COVID-19.

Because Māori have suffered disproportionately in past pandemics and are at greater risk from COVID-19, when the disease came to Aotearoa, Māori quickly mobilised: delivering food and hygiene supplies; checking on elders; and establishing checkpoints to monitor tribal borders. The National Iwi Chairs Forum established a Pandemic Response Group to coordinate and support responses and engage with government.

These acts of Rangatiratanga (self-determination) were needed to keep whānau (families) safe, and benefitted the whole community. Government would not have been able to reach Māori without the support of iwi, and Māori organisations.

Some positive practices from government were providing financial support to Māori initiatives, and meeting regularly with the National Iwi Chairs Forum.

Regarding the protection of Indigenous people's rights **post COVID-19**.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been absent from the government's response to COVID-19.

Progress towards developing a national action plan for the Declaration has stalled, yet a Declaration plan could have greatly assisted a more coordinated, Tiriti-based response.

Finally, what do **indigenous persons with disabilities need** to help them overcome this crisis.

COVID-19 has contributed to a rise in mental illness.

Tāngata Whaiora (people with experience of mental illness) have proposed changes that will significantly improve services, for example, by including whānau (family) at all levels of services and support.

Thank you Mr/Madam Chair.