

Draft Statement on Race Relations

Released at the New Zealand Diversity Forum on 28 August 2007, as a basis for discussion on "Finding Common Ground".

Note: This draft is only a starting point, not a finished product. Discussion and comment are invited on how it can be developed to best express and promote a shared understanding of the underpinnings of cultural diversity and harmonious relations in New Zealand.

Introduction

Aotearoa New Zealand is an increasingly diverse society, with a national identity that draws on its bicultural roots, its many different cultures and its location in the Asia-Pacific region.

Māori were the original settlers. They are the tangata whenua, the people of the land. Their language and culture are unique to these islands and are interwoven with the landscape.

From the 19th century the majority of settlers came from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. They were followed from the middle of the 20th century by significant numbers of migrants from continental Europe, the Pacific and Asia, and smaller groups from Africa, the Middle East and the Americas.

The foundations for racial equality in New Zealand were laid at the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between representatives of Māori and the Crown in 1840. The Treaty provided for kawanatanga – a unified government, rangatiratanga – a guarantee of Māori indigenous rights, and rite tahi – equality before the law.

The Treaty was breached by subsequent governments, and the process of acknowledging these wrongs, and negotiating redress, continues. The Treaty relationship between government and Māori today requires engagement for the active protection of indigenous rights, language, culture, lands and resources, enabling Māori to live as Māori.

International treaties uphold the equal rights of all, including freedom from discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, ethnicity and religion. These rights are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and other treaties. They are affirmed in the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act, the Human Rights Act and other legislation.

Freedom from Discrimination

Discrimination on the basis of race, colour, ethnic or national origins and religion is unlawful. All people in New Zealand have the right to protection from such discrimination and to appropriate remedies if they experience it.

Freedom of Expression

People are free to speak their mind, but not to incite racial hostility. People of diverse ethnicities, cultures and beliefs are entitled to be represented and given voice in the media in an accurate, balanced and fair manner.

Safety

Hateful acts including racial abuse, racial assault and damage to property are criminal offences. All people have the right to safety of their person and of their private and communal property.

Social Inclusion

New Zealand strives to be an inclusive society in which people of all ethnicities, cultures and beliefs can participate and be heard. People are entitled to be consulted and involved in decisions that affect them, and to be represented in all branches and at all levels of government.

Access and Opportunity

Access to work, education, health services, housing, justice, and goods and services should be available to all on an equal basis. Where social and economic inequalities exist between different ethnic groups, those that are disadvantaged are entitled to temporary special measures to achieve equality.

Settlement

Migrants have the same rights as other New Zealanders, with few exceptions. New migrants and refugees are entitled to support from government and the community to settle and integrate successfully.

Education

All children have a right to education. Through the curriculum and the culture of the school, they should be equipped for life in a diverse society, including recognition of their own language, culture and beliefs, knowledge of the cultures and beliefs of others, and respect for the rights of all.

Cultural Diversity

The diversity of New Zealanders' origins, cultures and beliefs is an important social, economic and cultural asset. This diversity is fostered, strengthened and celebrated through the arts, cultural programmes, and community development. All people have the right to practice their own culture, speak their own language and observe their own religion or belief.

The Rights of Others

All New Zealanders, in upholding and exercising their own rights and freedoms, have a responsibility to respect and uphold the rights and freedoms of others and to contribute to harmonious relationships between the diverse individuals and groups that make up New Zealand society.

