Tihei Mauriora!

E nga mana

e nga reo

e nga iwi

E rau rangatira ma

Nau mai, haere mai, piki mai

He mihi mahana na i nga tangata whaikaha, me nga tangata whaiora, nga tangata motuhake

Kia kaha, kia mau ki te tūmanako, tenei huihuinga ma koutou

Kō wai au?

Kō Remutaka te maunga

Kō Awa Kairangi te awa

Kō te Upoko o te ika a Maui te moana

Nō Whakatiki ahau.

Te Tiamana o Balance Aotearoa—Taurite Aotearoa ahau

Inaianei te Tiamana o te Disabled People’s Organisations’ Coalition ahau

Ko Leo McIntyre taku ingoa

No reira

Tena kotou, tena kotou, tena ra tatou katoa

Welcome everyone. I want to particularly acknowledge and thank you Minister Sepuloni for being here today, and for your ongoing commitiment to upholding the rights of disabled people. Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, e te rangatira kō Nigel. Thank you for opening the space for us to come together.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities describes in practical terms how the rights of disabled people can be realised on an equal basis with everyone else in society.

The Convention’s purpose is to promote, protect, and ensure universal human rights and fundamental freedoms for disabled people, and promote respect for our dignity, and our right to decide for ourselves.

Article 33 of the Convention requires governments to set up an Independent Monitoring Mechanism, or IMM. In New Zealand, the IMM consists of three partners. The Disabled People’s Organisations’ Coalition or ‘DPO Coalition’ as we are known, the Human Rights Commission, and the Office of the Ombudsman.

We work together to research and compile reports to the United Nations on New Zealand’s progress in implementing the Convention.

We are here today to launch the third of these reports. Entitled:

Making Disability Rights Real – Whakatūturu Ngā Tika Hauātanga

The dual title of this report highlights the partnership between Tauiwi and Māori, enshrined in our nation’s founding document, Te Tiriti O Waitangi.

The Disability Rights Convention does not explicitly consider indigenous people. However,

all of the recommendations in this report will help to address the inequities faced by tangata whaikaha—Māori disabled people, who remain among the most disadvantaged of our people.

The report acknowledges the Māori disability action plan, *Whāia Te Ao Mārama*, noting that there is no agency specifically contracted to support its implementation at this time.

It is now 13 years since New Zealand signed the Convention, and almost 12 years since it was ratified in September 2008. The DPO Coalition is proud of the progress New Zealand has made, and we thank disabled people, our partners in government, and the IMM for their hard work and the willingness to change that is making a real difference.

However, disabled people are still being subjected to incarceration and forced treatment, including solitary confinement and non-therapeutic interventions such as sterilisation, without their consent.

Disabled people are still disproportionately more unemployed or under-employed, have lower incomes, live in poorer housing, and have poorer access to good health and education.

Before any kind of intentional change can occur, there needs to be an awareness that change is needed.

For 20 years, the Like Minds – Like Mine programme has helped reduce prejudice and discrimination toward people with psychosocial disability, by raising awareness.

Other, **pan-**disability, awareness programmes have been short-lived and their effectiveness is not well understood, but something of that kind is sorely needed now.

Recent debates about the End of Life Choice Act 2019, and new forms of antenatal testing for genetic conditions have included some contraversial views. Views that can be seen as **de**-valuing the lives of disabled people, and promoting euthanasia and abortion ahead of providing an equal society.

To make disability rights real, we need immediate actions to counter the negative perceptions of disabled people and the low value placed on our lives in the minds of many New Zealanders.

We need comprehensive definitions and standards of universal design and accessibility, and we need to use them consistently.

Led by disabled people, the Accessibility Charter project is an example of how change should be brought about. Co-designed, system-wide, universal change.

We need sustainable and equitable funding models that remove existing disparities in the disability support system, so that all disabled people can live independently and participate fully in the community. And we need that change to be led by disabled people from the start.

Never again should a disabled person have to say:

“I cannot access anything I would like to access without support from another person.” A direct quote from this report.

Everything from the mundane, to some of the most private and intimate aspects of disabled people’s lives may be witnessed by others, and sometimes become the subject of gossip and casual conversation. That this situation still exists is unacceptable.

We need our right to have a home and family upheld, and our homes and families to be respected. The right to be a parent, or to live with one’s own family should not be denied on the basis of disability.

We need the ability to participate equally in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport.

Because we are all human, and we all need to feel connected.

Locked down during Covid-19, many New Zealanders gained at least an inkling of what it is to be unable to access the world they take for granted. We need to build on that understanding, with the voices and experience of disabled people.

The true value of Article 33 of the Convention was really brought home to me last week, when I spoke with a colleague in the field of mental health Peer Support.

She expressed her gratitude for the fact that, while he was still alive, a friend of hers had the opportunity to speak about his experiences in mental health services, as part of a Convention monitoring process.

He spoke about how having his rights removed under the Mental Health Act left him bereft of the sense that he had autonomy over his body and his life.

The opportunity to stand in his authority and speak, and have to his kōrero honoured, gave this man a sense of emowerment and hope that what he shared would help to preserve others from the same indignities and distress that he experienced by having his rights removed. Sadly however, he later took his own life.

When we fail, as a society, to provide the sense of being equal.

When we fail to provide a sense of belonging and of being valued.

When we fail to make change happen rapidly enough.

Disabled people suffer.

Disabled people lose hope.

Disabled people die.

Listening to the stories, the voices of disabled people, gives us valuable information about what needs to change. It gives those who speak some hope that they will live to see that change. But listening is not enough. Everyone here has an interest in advancing the rights of disabled people. We need, each one of us, to take personal responsibility and do the most we can.

It is up to all of us to make disabilty rights real.

Thank you for your attention. I will hand over now to our Chief Ombudsman, Judge Peter Boshier.