



# Human Rights Milestones New Zealand

## Pre-1840

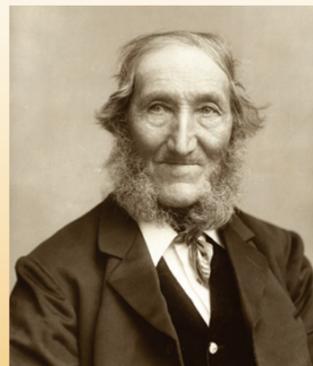
Human rights concepts existed in Te Ao Māori – literally “the Māori world” – before Europeans arrived in Aotearoa.



Marcus King's painting of the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. ATL NON-ATL-0173.

## 1840

Carpenter Samuel Parnell successfully makes a stand for an eight-hour working day. After support from other workers, the eight-hour day became standard for some occupations, although the many women employed as domestic servants did not enjoy the same capped hours.



Samuel Parnell. ATL 1/1-020462-G.



William Pember Reeves. ATL 1/2-031782-F.

## 1894

William Pember Reeves' Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act introduces compulsory arbitration in industrial disputes. It was the first in a series of labour acts handing New Zealand workers an extensive system of regulations and workers' rights.

## 1942-1948

During and immediately after World War II, New Zealand played a significant part in developing an international human rights framework. As a founding member of the United Nations, it helped draw up the UN Charter in 1945 and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

## 1972-1978

In 1972 New Zealand ratifies the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Convention commits members to the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of understanding among all races. In 1978, New Zealand ratifies the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.



Photo: Fred LŌAmi.

## 1985

New Zealand ratifies the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It has been described as an international bill of rights for women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

## 1987

After anti-nuclear protests, the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act comes into force. The Act established New Zealand as a nuclear-free zone and banned nuclear-powered ships from entering our waters.

## 1989

New Zealand ratifies the UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Convention requires countries to prevent torture within their borders and forbids states to return people to home countries if it is believed they will be tortured.

## 1990

The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act becomes law. It sets out the civil and political rights and fundamental freedoms of New Zealand citizens.

## 1993

New Zealand ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which enshrines the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children. Nations that ratify the Convention are bound to it by international law.

The Human Rights Act 1993 extends the protections of New Zealanders from unlawful discrimination by including new grounds of discrimination – disability, political opinion, employment status, family status and sexual orientation.



Robert Martin. Photo: Double Scoop Photography.

## 1840

The Treaty of Waitangi is signed, providing for kawanatanga, unified government; rangatiratanga, Māori indigenous rights; and rite tahi, equality before the law. The Treaty has been described as New Zealand's first immigration law but could also be described as the country's first human rights law.



Watercolour, circa 1943, by Thomas Biddulph. ATL E-137-q-009.

Thirteen Māori women signed the Treaty – there probably would have been more but some British officials did not allow Māori women to sign because they presumed they had as few rights as British women of the time.

## 1877

Free compulsory primary school education for all children is introduced. This was partly because of the Scottish commitment to education. Higher education, however, was still seen as a waste of time for children “whose vocation is that of honest labour”.

## 1893

New Zealand women win the right to vote, New Zealand is the first country to do so. Female suffrage had an unprecedented level of support – the final petition was signed by some 32,000 women, almost a quarter of adult Pakeha females. New Zealand received widespread international acclaim from British, Australian and United States suffrage campaigners.



Suffragist leader Kate Sheppard. ATL PUBL-0089-1914-001.

## 1945

Public outrage forces the abandonment of Family Benefit rules which excludes mothers of illegitimate children and widows – including war widows – from receiving payments.

## 1978

The Human Rights Commission is established by the Human Rights Commission Act 1977 and is empowered to protect rights in accordance with UN covenants and conventions. It has a range of functions and powers to do this.



## 1981

There is widespread protest against the tour by the Springbok rugby team from apartheid South Africa. Police don riot gear when pro-tour enthusiasts and anti-tour protestors clash. One game, in Hamilton, was called off when protestors spilled on to the rugby ground before the game.



Protests against the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand in 1981. ATL EP/1981/2657/9.

## 2001

The Human Rights Amendment Act 2001 makes significant changes to the Act. It merges the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator with the Human Rights Commission and sets out the functions of the new Race Relations Commissioner. Provision is also made for the appointment of an Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner and the Office of Human Rights Proceedings. The focus of the Commission changes from anti-discrimination to broader human rights.

## 2008

The Disability (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) Act 2008 is passed into law allowing New Zealand to ratify the Convention. New Zealanders were at the birth of the Convention adopted by the UN in 2006. Consumer rights advocate Robert Martin was the first person with an intellectual disability to speak before the UN General Assembly.