Short address at the Buddy Day breakfast

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Tena Koutou Katoa

Thank you to the team at Child Matters for inviting me to Buddy Day and entrusting me with the care of a buddy today. It is good to see Chairman Neil Richardson again.

Today my buddy will be with me as I spend my day with the judges of our Supreme Court and many others involved in the legal and justice system. There will be plenty of opportunities to start conversations about my buddy.

The people I talk with today, and of course the Minister of Justice, share your passion for eliminating child abuse in New Zealand.

As a child I learnt how bad it could be from my friends at school who told me about getting bashed at home.

In the 1970’s my father, a school deputy principal, banned corporal punishment in his school because he thought it was wrong and it legitimised those beatings.

Violence and abuse is the most unacceptable form of discrimination. It is also a gross breach of fundamental rights and freedoms such as the right to life and personal security.

Violence and abuse, particularly towards women and children, is New Zealand’s most persistent human rights abuse. It is truly shameful that the mothers of children and thousands of children are not being protected by those close to them but rather, are being physically hurt. I acknowledge that some men suffer from family violence as well and most certainly boys do.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration. When rights of two humans are balanced, and one is a child, the child’s rights are paramount.

Child Matters is to be commended for creating Buddy Day as a way to start conversations about child abuse.

We have so many conversations about international atrocities and these conversations are at the very top level but what about atrocities at home?

Recently, there has been a lot of political and media attention around the threat level for terrorist activity in New Zealand being lifted from Very Low to Low – meaning possible, but unlikely.

The fact is that the threat level for child abuse in New Zealand is very, very high. In fact it is currently a dead certain for many children.

It is dead certain that on average one child will be killed in New Zealand every five weeks. Yes, that is incredibly alarming isn’t it?

It is a dead certain that 90% of those deaths will be perpetrated by someone the child knew.

It is dead certain that nearly 9,000 children a year will be born at risk of abuse.

It is dead certain there will be close to 150,000 reports of concern to Child, Youth and Family.

It is dead certain that there will be over 20,000 cases of substantiated child abuse this year.

New Zealand has the fifth worst child abuse record out of 31 OECD Countries.

But I am certain we can change this appalling situation and talking about it a lot more and often is a start. Raising this conversation to the top level is a good start and today my buddy will be present with the top level of our judiciary.

There are plans, such as the Children’s Action Plan, that are seeking to address the issue but in the end it is up to each and all of us to be the change that is needed. We need to notice and speak up.

The Human Rights Commission believes there is a need for an even more joined up response by Government to violence and abuse – a response that deals with violence and abuse of children, family violence and sexual violence and with some of the underpinning and common causes.

The threat level for child abuse in New Zealand should be Low or Very Low rather than currently HIGH. We can and must do better.

What my work all over the world with people with intellectual disability has taught me is that nothing changes in this world without strong and effective civil society organisations like Child Matters.

I strongly agree with you that it is up to all of us to keep kids safe. That is what the human rights conventions say. Each and every one of us has the responsibility to respect and protect the human dignity and rights of everyone everywhere every day and that includes children.

Please keep up this good work because nothing in this world changes for the good without people like you.

I will take such good care of my precious buddy today and spend my day thinking about how we can better keep our precious children safe and include the perspective of this buddy in what I do.

Ka kite ano