





A CHURCH LEADERS' STATEMENT FOR 1990



150 years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi



1990 marks a number of milestones in the history of our nation. The central one is the fact that 150 years have passed since the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. This gives an opportunity to take stock of what has happened during the last 150 years, and look to the future.

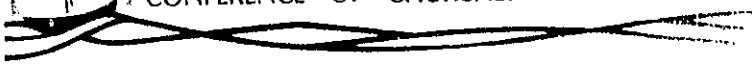
For the people of New Zealand the Treaty of Waitangi is a key element in making us a unique nation. It is a living document affirming inalienable Maori rights and providing the basis for settlement, government, and our life together as peoples of a Treaty.

In this statement we wish to set out ways that this anniversary year can be a time for us all to examine and learn from the past, and to renew our commitment to express the Treaty in our future life together.

The Christian Church holds the right to speak about and be concerned for the Treaty of Waitangi. Many of the signatories, both Maori and Pakeha, were Christian. We acknowledge the influence of the Christian missionaries in the events of 1840 — in advocating, translating, witnessing the signing, and collecting the signatures to the Treaty. When it was signed there was also specific reference made to protection of the rights of the various religious traditions of both Maori and Pakeha. So, from the Christians who were



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present in 1840, through the Churches of the settlers who arrived subsequently, to our Churches today, the Treaty remains part of our history, part of our life, part of our responsibility.

We are a nation made up of peoples from many parts of the world; all are bound together in that special covenant relationship with the original people of the land — te tangata whenua. For all who have come to live in New Zealand since 1840, the Treaty of Waitangi guarantees the right to be here, a right which carries with it responsibilities to be people of the Treaty — te tangata tiriti. We are linked together by a relationship, a partnership founded on mutual assurances and obligations between those signing.

As for us in our own Churches, we accept the challenge this gives us to make sure that we are working in a way that honours the Treaty, and respects the rights and obligations it guarantees. This includes an acknowledgement of the status of the tangata whenua, and of tino rangatiratanga. It involves such things as the sharing of power and resources, the investigation of our land-holdings, the rapid settlement of just claims and the use of the Maori language.

In 1990 we affirm that this is our Treaty and we resolve to honour it.



In the course of 150 years, as settlers outnumbered Maori, established patterns of life emerged that have often excluded Maori values and lifestyle. The settlers built their values and priorities into the institutional systems — schools, prisons, courts, parliament, trade unions, local bodies, hospitals and churches. Today, as many social indicators show, those systems serve the needs and interests of Pakeha people better than they serve Maori people. Today, most of the land is controlled by Pakeha people. English is the language spoken. Maori cultural values and practices have been eroded. It is a struggle for Maori people to hold on to those things which they were guaranteed under the Treaty.

While Maori have sought to have the Treaty honoured over the years, for many New Zealanders it has only recently come back into focus. It requires a response. Today, the commitment of Maori people to the Treaty of Waitangi remains visible. This commitment is less obvious for others, although there are signs of hope. We affirm the significant advances made by some people in the study and understanding of the Treaty as the essential basis of change for us all.

The backlog of claims before the Waitangi Tribunal is ample evidence that there are continuing and compounding injustices to be put right. However, a sense of fairness and mutual goodwill exists alongside continuing ignorance, fear and anger. Many families share the heritage of both Treaty partners, and there are bonds of friendship and neighbourliness.

In 1990 we acknowledge these realities that have emerged from our history, and we resolve to work for justice and equity, so that Gospel reconciliation may prevail.

What do we see and hope for in the future?

As Christians we recognise God's loving presence among all peoples. We rejoice in the love of God which empowers us in our struggle towards justice and unity. We believe that Christ leads us to affirm the dignity and worth of every human being.

We believe that it is our Christian calling in Aotearoa to honour the Treaty. It was seen by many in 1840 as a covenant with its own spiritual significance and we uphold that today. In this we follow the leadership of people like Sir James Henare who considered the Treaty of Waitangi to be "a sacred treasure". We believe the Treaty is the basis of our nationhood.

We give thanks that the Treaty of Waitangi makes possible an exciting future if only we have the courage to make it the focus of our nation-building. This year is our chance to put fears to rest. We are convinced that truth and justice are stronger than fear. To respect and abide by the Treaty is to act justly. We call on Christians, and all other people of goodwill, to live out that hope.

We believe there are Treaty issues of power and resource-sharing to be firmly, fairly and speedily settled in both church and state.

We believe the means for cultural survival and renewed development of the tangata whenua, as they themselves determine, are priorities in the just distribution of resources.

We believe there needs to be political restructuring which recognises Maori as a people possessing tino rangatiratanga according to the terms of the Treaty.

We believe that the Maori values of stewardship and conservation, which we share, need to be incorporated into joint and continuing care for our environment.

We believe in and trust the Waitangi Tribunal as a forum for examining Maori claims. Any delay in implementing the Tribunal's recommendations for purely political reasons cannot be tolerated. We also affirm the continuing need for the Tribunal as an effective and creative means of identifying past injustices, and seeking just ways the Treaty partners can work together in the future.


We believe a strong and creative partnership, in all aspects of our common life, based on the Treaty, will give us peace and strength. This partner-

ship will involve a deep mutual respect, communication, and pride in our cultural heritages. We offer to the nation what is true for us in the Church:

God has established a harmony in the body, giving special honour to that which needed it most. There was to be no want of unity in the body; all the different parts of it were to make each other's welfare their common care. If one part is suffering, all the rest suffer with it; if one part is treated with honour, all the rest find pleasure in it.

(1 Corinthians 12:24-26)

In 1990 this is our confidence and our hope.



<p><i>R. H. Beh</i> Rev Rodney H Beh President Lutheran Church of New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Elizabeth Duke</i> Elizabeth Duke Clerk Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) Yearly Meeting of Aotearoa/New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Metropolitan Dionysios</i> Metropolitan Dionysios Archbishop of New Zealand Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of New Zealand</p>
<p><i>Brian N Davis</i> The Most Reverend Brian N Davis, Primate and Archbishop of New Zealand, Bishop of Wellington The Church of the Province of New Zealand (commonly called the Anglican Church)</p>	<p><i>Thomas Card. Williams</i> His Eminence Cardinal Thomas S Williams Archbishop of Wellington and Metropolitan of New Zealand Roman Catholic Church</p>	
<p><i>Neil Churcher</i> The Right Reverend Neil Churcher Moderator of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church of New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Robin J Davis</i> The Rev Robin J Davis Conference President Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand</p>	<p><i>Barry E Jones</i> The Rev Barry E Jones President The Methodist Church of New Zealand Te Hahi Mēteriana O Aotearoa</p>

General Secretariat:

Doreen Hatch,	Jocelyn Armstrong,	Elizabeth Mackie,
Auckland Office	Wellington Office	Christchurch Office
5 Short Street	175 Victoria Street	165 Lichfield Street
P.O. Box 9573,	P.O. Box 27-264,	P.O. Box 22-652,
AUCKLAND	WELLINGTON	CHRISTCHURCH



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