

Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand
Response to Race Relations Statement
RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT STATEMENT ON RACE RELATIONS

Wednesday, 20 February 2008

Within the Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand we seek to practice all of the principles set out in the draft statement on race relations. We see these values as fundamental to becoming a successful republic.

The movement believes, however, there are fundamental flaws in New Zealand's commitment to racial equality and good race relations. We aim to resolve these issues in a democratic way and feel the draft statement has clearly outlined the issues that need attention. There is one important change we would like to see incorporated into the statement to reflect our ongoing concerns. We have set out this suggestion, and our reasons for it, below.

The Republican Movement is an organisation of New Zealanders from many different backgrounds and political beliefs working together toward a common aim. In order to achieve our shared aim of becoming a republic we discuss and respect each other's differing points of view. In seeking to respect each other's opinions in this way and to achieve shared aims we look to value within our incorporated society the type of values we feel most benefit the wider society. We believe in fair and open debate, because we want to establish a republic where such discussion enables all New Zealanders to participate more fully in the cultural and political life of their country.

As part of this aim we acknowledge the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and feel that our efforts to become a republic are a way of resolving the disputes that have arisen between 'the Crown' and Maori. We are committed to encouraging wider understanding of the Treaty and its role within our constitutional arrangements.

Our ongoing Concerns

Our main concerns are the instances of institutional discrimination and exclusion, evident in New Zealand's constitutional arrangements. Specifically we are concerned with the privileged role of the British Monarchy within our constitutional affairs. This relates to statement three (Freedom from Discrimination) and statement six (Participation) of the draft statement.

We feel the right to be represented at all levels of government is a fundamental one and that it is therefore an issue that warrants urgent attention from wider New Zealand society.

The Republican Movement asserts very strongly, and reminds every person and group interested in promoting diversity and tolerance, that at the highest constitutional level of government one cultural group retains exclusive rights and privileges.

Our head of state, the person chosen to symbolise and represent the people within the constitution, is an unelected and hereditary leader. New Zealanders are denied the opportunity to choose our head of state and no consultation occurs when her representative in Wellington is appointed. Under our current constitution our head of state is pre-selected by a hereditary system that discriminates on the grounds of gender, nationality, ethnicity and religious affiliation.

Republican Movement of Aotearoa New Zealand

Response to Race Relations Statement

Our head of state is by law also the head of the Church of England, the Anglican Church. This privileges Christianity and the Anglican Church and establishes a de jure state religion in New Zealand.

To promote race relations in New Zealand and not acknowledge the constitutionally privileged position of British culture in this respect is to close our eyes to a fundamental contradiction in our society. This contradiction excludes all New Zealanders, and is increasingly at odds with the aspirations of New Zealanders of British decent.

Suggested Amendments to the Statement

We welcome the draft statement of race relations. We feel it points toward the need to address inequities and inconsistencies inherent in the current monarchical system of government.

We would like to see the following changes made to statement six in order to make clear the ongoing problems inherent in race relations in New Zealand. By making the problem explicit we feel it acknowledges our grievance and points to our right to have our grievances heard. The changes we suggest are highlighted below in bold:

6. Participation

Aotearoa New Zealand seeks 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 **areas** and at all levels of **our** government and **constitution**.

Given the contradictions evident in our constitutional arrangements we would like it made clear that our current system of government includes the British Monarchy. We therefore want the term "constitution" included in statement six in order to encompass this wider definition of government.

There is a clear distinction between the institutional forms of government (branches and levels) and the philosophical and constitutional basis of such institutions. That is to say government 'by the people and of the people'.

Monarchists argue that "the Sovereign embodies the nation" and it is a constitutional convention that the head of state represents the nation (as 'the people') with respect to the formal arrangements of the state and the government of the day. The head of state exists within a constitutional framework and as such it might be argued by Monarchists that the Monarchy exists outside 'government' and is therefore not affected by the statement on race relations. With the proposed change we feel it is made explicitly clear that the Monarchy is part of our government and constitution.

We use the word "area" as it encompasses the notion of a 'branch' and because also it resolves the distinction to be made between a constitution, as one single document, (which we do not have) and a constitution as a set of conventions, laws and traditions (which we do have). As an organisation we do not have a position on whether New Zealand needs to adopt a single written constitution.

We look forward to having our concerns addressed and we welcome the further discussion about discrimination in New Zealand and the role of the Monarchy in perpetuating this discrimination.