**MEDIA RELEASE**

**“2014: a big year for getting it right in Aotearoa”**

Environmental health; responsible management of our fisheries, forests and other natural resources; the quality of our freshwater lakes, rivers and aquifers; oil and mineral extraction in our lands and oceans; genetic modification of life forms.

“These are all highly controversial issues of our day,” says Rachel Witana, “not just for Māori, but for all New Zealanders”.

Ms Witana, speaking on behalf of the Te Rarawa WAI 262 Flora and Fauna claimants to the Waitangi Tribunal, is adamant that the time has arrived for Māori and Pākehā alike to realise that the state of our nation has reached a critical point, and that we must work together to improve our situation.

“It’s not only environmental issues that we have been deeply disturbed about since the WAI 262 claim’s origins going back to the 1970’s. Decades later, we are observing an ever-increasing incidence of democratic and human rights abuses happening right on our doorstep.”

As examples, Ms Witana cited the establishment of the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB), the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPPA), forced economic dependence on environmentally-harmful carbon-based fossil fuels, the unprecedented degree of corporate influence over policy and law-making, and the perpetuation of a failed capitalist debt-based money system which ensures the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

“Māori have our own more particularised concerns as well, such as the large numbers of Māori in prisons; the over-representation of Māori in negative statistics for health, household income, education achievement; the still fragile state of Māori language; inappropriate use of Māori traditional knowledge; the discriminatory Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011 (successor to the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004); and violations of indigenous human rights.”

Ms Witana explained that for Te Rarawa, these matters all go to the heart of the WAI 262 claim which is essentially about regaining Māori self-determination as guaranteed to us under Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ the Treaty of Waitangi. She considers that Māori Treaty Claims Settlements have gone some way to addressing a number of environmental and social concerns. However, she called on all New Zealanders - whether in the private, public or industry sectors - to see these not just of interest to Māori, but rather symptomatic of the more deeply-rooted need for true nationhood sovereignty, good governance and social justice for all.

“In that sense, these issues are of real concern to all people in Aotearoa. The Government Constitutional Review Panel report released November last year echoes many of our concerns, and we understand an independent Māori Constitutional review is also soon to be released. Thanks to the internet and other information technology, knowledge of these issues is all publicly available for anyone who cares to see it. The time for pleading ignorance has long past, and the time for meaningful citizen action is now.”

Being an election year, Ms Witana looked forward to some meaningful dialogue between hapū, iwi authorities, community interest groups, socially-conscious business leaders, taxpayers and political party candidates about their campaign policy platforms and commitments. “Every Government is meant to be by the People, for the People. Let’s demand more accountability from our politicians on these issues.”

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