

16 January 2013

Ms Gabriella Habtom
Secretary
Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
UNOG-OHCHR
CH-1211 Geneva 10
Switzerland

Dear Ms Habtom

CERD 55th Session: Review of New Zealand

The Community Languages Association of New Zealand (CLANZ) represents ethnic communities, community language schools and individuals who wish to ensure that their heritage languages are kept strong and vigorous and particularly that children from ethnic communities are able to learn and use their mother tongue as an important part of their cultural identity. We have a vision of a society that is multicultural and multilingual, and believe it is important for all New Zealanders belonging to ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities to enjoy the right, guaranteed by Article 27 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to enjoy the culture, to profess and practice the religion and to use the language of that minority. We support the National Statement on Language Policy published by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission in 2008, which states that “People whose community or heritage language is other than English, Māori or Pacific should have the opportunity and support to learn and use these languages through public and community provision.” (see appendix).

We note that the Committee, at its 55th Session next month, will conduct a review of New Zealand. CLANZ respectfully asks the Committee to support our request to the New Zealand government to work in partnership with community language providers to provide community language teaching in schools and in the community. Our case in summary is as follows:

- The New Zealand Curriculum has “languages” as a learning area but provides no resources, policy or support to communities
- Community groups are willing to provide this learning but many need support to:
 - develop resources
 - access places to learn

- access trained teachers who are able to teach to NCEA standards
- A comprehensive strategy from the government is needed to support community languages, including a process to establish NCEA recognition of languages
- Community groups want to work in partnership with the government and the Ministry of Education to achieve this.

CLANZ has consulted widely on this matter. These objectives reflect the views of its members and were recently endorsed by 300 delegates at the 2012 Community Languages and ESOL (CLESOL) Conference in Palmerston North. There is an opportunity now to address this by the government.

We submit this issue to the Committee's consideration as we believe that the cultural rights of ethnic communities are covered by Article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and that there is an urgent need to address this issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sunita Narayan', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Sunita Narayan (Mrs)

President

Community Languages Association of New Zealand

Appendix: Statement on Language Policy

Introduction

New Zealand is a diverse society in a globalised international community. It has an indigenous language, te reo Māori, and a bicultural Māori and Anglo-Celtic foundation. It is located in the Asia Pacific region and many people from the Pacific and Asia have settled here. Languages are a valuable national resource in terms of our cultural identities, cultural diversity and international connectedness. They are vitally important for individuals and communities, bringing educational, social, cultural and economic benefits. They contribute to all three national priorities of national identity, economic transformation and families young and old.

English is the most widely used language in New Zealand and the ability to communicate in English is important for all New Zealanders. Te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language are recognised by law as official languages. The number of speakers of te reo Māori is now increasing but much remains to be done to secure its future as a living language.

A majority of New Zealanders currently speak only one language. There are however significant communities that have a heritage language other than English. New Zealand's Māori, Pacific and Asian communities alone make up nearly a third of the population. The most common community languages other than English are te reo Māori, Chinese languages, Samoan, and Hindi.

Human Rights and Responsibilities

The right to learn and use one's own language is an internationally recognised human right. Human rights treaties and declarations specifically refer to rights and responsibilities in relation to indigenous languages, minority languages, learning and using one's mother tongue, the value of learning international languages, and access to interpretation and translation services. The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act provides that 'a person who belongs to an ethnic, religious, or linguistic minority in New Zealand shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of that minority, to enjoy the culture, to profess and practise the religion, or to use the language of that minority'.

New Zealand has a particular responsibility under the Treaty of Waitangi and international law to protect and promote te reo Māori as the indigenous language of New Zealand. It also has a special responsibility to protect and promote other languages that are indigenous to the New Zealand realm: Vagahau Niue, Gagana Tokelau, Cook Island Māori, and New Zealand Sign Language. It has a regional responsibility as a Pacific nation to promote and protect other Pacific languages, particularly where significant proportions of their communities live in New Zealand.

Economic Development

A significant and growing proportion of New Zealand's trade is with Asia and learning the languages of our key trading partners is an economic imperative.

Languages

English

All New Zealanders should have the opportunity and support to achieve oral competence and literacy in English through school, adult literacy programmes and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) programmes.

Te Reo Maori

All New Zealanders should have the opportunity and support to learn te reo Māori and use it in the home, in education and in the community. The importance of maintaining te reo Māori as a unique indigenous living New Zealand language should be publicly promoted as part of our national heritage and identity.

New Zealand Sign Language

All Deaf people should have the opportunity and support to learn and use New Zealand Sign Language in the home, in education and in the community and have access to interpreters. Other New Zealanders should also have the opportunity and support to learn and use NZSL.

Pacific Languages

All Cook Island Māori, Niuean and Tokelauan people living in New Zealand should have the opportunity and support to learn and use their heritage language. Other Pacific peoples in New Zealand should have the opportunity and support to learn and use their languages through public and community provision.

Community and Heritage Languages

People whose community or heritage language is other than English, Māori or Pacific should have the opportunity and support to learn and use these languages through public and community provision.

International Languages

New Zealanders should be encouraged and given opportunities and support to learn international languages, including those of New Zealand's key trading partners.

Strategies

Within a general languages policy framework specific strategies are needed for both priority language groups and priority sectors. All such strategies should recognise that:

- New Zealand is a country with a small population and limited resources to support language diversity
- Choices have to be made about the relative priority of providing for the various languages, sectors and objectives based on the degree of endangerment, human rights, government responsibilities, economic benefits and the population base
- Strategies and programmes for these languages and sectors must be coordinated to make the most effective use of available resources.

Language Strategies

There should be specific national strategies for English literacy and ESOL, te reo Māori, New Zealand Sign Language, Pacific languages, community and heritage languages and international languages. Such strategies should address the dual goals of language maintenance and development within minority communities and wider public acceptance of language diversity.

Sector Strategies

There should be sector strategies for languages in the home, the community, education (early childhood centres, schools, tertiary), public services (including translation and interpretation services), business and broadcasting.

Prorities

Priorities in the implementation of a national languages policy are to:

- Establish an appropriate coordinating and monitoring mechanism for language policy and identify lead organisations for specific language and sector strategies
- Develop and maintain strategies for the identified languages and sectors
- Promote cooperation and sharing between agencies and communities in the development of strategies, resources and services
- Promote positive public attitudes to language diversity and increase the number of people learning languages
- Train and support more teachers of languages
- Develop resources to support language learning and use.