

Target: 10 mins – approx. 1300 words
actual 1514 (11.6 mins)

Introduction

Mihi

E ngā mana,	All authorities,
E ngā reo,	All voices,
E ngā karangatanga maha,	The many affiliations,
Tēnā koutou.	Greetings.

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, and guests. Thank you for the opportunity to present New Zealand's fourth periodic report under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

My name is Andrew Little and I am the Minister of Justice, for Courts, and Treaty of Waitangi Negotiations for the New Zealand Government. I am also the Minister responsible for New Zealand's intelligence agencies and the Minister Responsible for Pike River re-entry. (Pike River was a coal mine on the West Coast of the South Island where in 2010, 29 men perished following a series of methane explosions. Their bodies have not been recovered).

I am joined today by Jillian Dempster, New Zealand's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Geneva and Andrew Bridgman, Chief Executive and Secretary for Justice. As well as officials from our:

- Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Ministry for Social Development
- Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment
- Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry for Māori Development and
- Ministry of Education.

This meeting will provide an opportunity for us to benefit from the Committee's expertise and knowledge as well as receive constructive views. We look forward to engaging in an open and frank discussion with the Committee and benefiting from its knowledge.

Before I speak to some of the changes since the report was submitted, I will very briefly outline some of our history and the context of human rights in New Zealand.

Context

New Zealand is a diverse, multi-cultural Pacific nation that prides itself on the promotion of human rights and equal treatment for all our citizens.

The relationship between the Government and Māori, the indigenous people of New Zealand, is a significant aspect of our nation's identity.

New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840, forms the basis of this relationship.

Over the course of history, New Zealand has moved from a place where the rights of Māori under the Treaty were breached and their needs largely ignored, to a place where Māori perspectives are commonly informing decision-making. As the Minister for Treaty Settlements I continue to advance the economic and cultural redress for iwi/hapu [tribal groups] through comprehensive settlements between Māori groups and the Crown.

New Zealand has a long history of commitment to human rights in general and economic, social and cultural rights in particular. This year marks 70 years since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At the adoption of the Declaration, New Zealand stressed that personal freedom is incomplete unless individuals also enjoy economic, social and cultural rights.

This sentiment is still strongly held in New Zealand to this day.

Changes since the report was published

Since New Zealand submitted its last report, there has been significant change in New Zealand. Following the General Election in September 2017, the New Zealand Labour Party formed a coalition Government with the New Zealand First Party and with the support of the Green Party of New Zealand. This new government was sworn in at the end of October and this marked a change in direction for New Zealand after nine years of a centre-right National Party led Government.

I will use this opening statement to briefly outline six of the Government's priorities that mark a shift in approach since New Zealand submitted its report that particularly intersect with crucial economic, social and cultural issues.

The issues I will address are:

- a commitment to reducing child poverty
- increasing access to housing
- tertiary education
- secure employment

as well as two significant inquiries:

- a Royal Commission of inquiry into historic abuse in state care
- and a Government inquiry into mental health and addiction.

Child poverty reduction targets

First, the Government has a strong commitment to achieving a significant and sustained reduction in child poverty. One of our top priorities has been the recently released Child Poverty Reduction Bill.

This Bill sets out a framework for how we will hold ourselves accountable for reducing child poverty and improving the wellbeing of our youngest citizens. We want New Zealand to be the best place in the world to be a child. Currently between 150,000 and 210,000 children are living in poverty or hardship, with around 64,000 in more severe hardship.

Our plan is to set robust measures and require successive Governments to set targets against them. Every year the Government will be required to report on progress against these targets through the Budget process, and indicate how new spending initiatives will reduce child poverty.

Housing

Second, the new Government has embarked on an ambitious plan to address New Zealand's acute housing shortage. We are committed to building 100,000 new homes (an increase in 5%) over 10 years. Forty percent of these homes will be affordable homes or social and emergency housing. Renting is fast becoming the norm in New Zealand as home ownership rates have fallen from 74 per cent in 1991 to 65 per cent. The Government wants to make renting a secure and healthy experience. The Government has committed to review aspects of the Residential Tenancies Act to improve the experience of renters in New Zealand including tenancy security.

We have also recently enacted legislation around minimum housing standards. The new law enables the Government to set healthy home minimum standards that cover heating, insulation, ventilation, drainage, draught stopping, and moisture.

We will require landlords to meet the healthy homes minimum standards to ensure that rental properties are warm and dry. The healthy homes minimum standards will have significant public health benefits by improving the quality of rental housing. This Government intends to minimise the health-related risks arising out of poor quality housing.

Tertiary Education

Another priority for this Government is access to education. Education creates opportunity. It enables people to contribute fully to our society. However, costs can be a significant barrier to tertiary education. From the start of this year, everyone starting tertiary education, or training for the first time, is eligible for one year of full-time study or the first two years of an apprenticeship without fees. This will be extended to cover the first three years of study from 2024. Student allowances and living costs loans have also been significantly increased. This policy means that all people who have not previously done so, can better afford to participate in tertiary education, gaining the benefits and opportunities of lifelong learning.

Employment

Turning now to employment. This Government has a commitment to building a high-performing economy that delivers good jobs, decent working conditions and fair wages. We have introduced a number of amendments to employment relations legislation that will restore fairness in the workplace. These changes will provide greater protections to workers, especially vulnerable workers. A second round of changes will seek to strengthen the role of collective bargaining in the workplace to ensure fair wages and conditions, following consultation and engagement with social partners.

In relation to employment creation, the new government has launched a plan for significant public investment in our regional economies as a spur to regional job growth and private investment. In addition to this, we have also announced a specific employment programme for young people in more deprived areas.

Inquiry into abuse in state care

I will now address our first significant inquiry. The Government has a clear responsibility to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm and exploitation while they are in its care. Abuse in State care, whether physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect, is inconsistent with domestic and international standards and principles. When it occurs it warrants prompt examination.

Previous government responses to concerns of abuse in care have included confidential listening and assistance processes, processes for addressing historic claims, and organisational reviews and reorganisation. Notwithstanding these measures there have been public calls for an independent inquiry into abuse in state care for several years.

Since New Zealand's report was submitted, the Government announced its commitment to establishing a Royal Commission of Inquiry into Historical Abuse in State Care. Royal Commissions are reserved for the most serious issues of public importance. This sends a signal of how seriously we take this issue. We want to acknowledge and learn from the experiences of those who have been abused in state care. The Royal Commission's draft Terms of Reference take a broad focus on any form of abuse experienced by an individual, whether a child, young person or

adult, in situations where the State was responsible for their care. The Royal Commission will undertake independent public consultation on the draft Terms of Reference. After the Terms of Reference have been finalised, the Royal Commission will begin its substantive investigations.

This Inquiry is a chance to confront our history and make sure we don't make the same mistakes again.

Mental Health Inquiry

I move now to the issue of mental health. We acknowledge that our country has a problem with mental health, and our suicide rate is unacceptable. The Government is committed to taking action to improve the lives of people with mental health issues.

The Government has taken a major step towards improving mental health and addiction services, with the recent announcement of a ministerial inquiry into mental health and addiction. Currently, our mental health services are stretched and demand has grown rapidly in recent years.

The inquiry is broad. It will have a particular focus on equity of access to quality services and better outcomes, especially for Māori and other groups who we know have the poorest outcomes in these areas.

New chapter in government relations with indigenous people

One final point about the government's approach should be made. It is in the area of relations with our indigenous people. We call this Crown/Maori relations. As we move towards settling the outstanding claims of historical breaches by the government of its obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi, the new government has made it a priority to create the foundation for a future relationship based on partnership. A Minister now has a dedicated role in establishing this future relationship based on principles of partnership, participation, protection, and recognition of cultural values.

Conclusion

Madam Chair, members of the Committee, I would like to restate the continuing commitment of the New Zealand Government to its international human rights obligations. New Zealand's approach to human rights focuses on respect for every person, but with recognition that there are areas where we can do better.

We are proud of our record as a contributor, nationally and internationally to human rights. We also acknowledge that we are facing some challenges – and some can be more easily addressed than others. We look forward to engaging with the Committee to continue to better protect and promote the economic, social and cultural rights of New Zealanders.

Thank you Madam Chair.

Nō reira, kāti mō tēnei wā.	Therefore, that is enough for now.
Kei a koutou te wā.	The time (to speak) is with you.
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.	Greetings, greetings, greetings to us all.