

Finale to workshops

Rangatira ma, e hoa ma, rangatahi ma - Kia ora tatau katoa

Distinguished Guests, Members of Parliament, and young leaders of workshops – our constitutional warriors.

This is a special evening, as we draw to the end of an intense two-days of thinking, debating and constructing ideas for a constitution.

Fifty young leaders, ranging in age from 16 to 28 years of age, have mulled over a very broad range of constitutional matters. They were urged to be ambitious – and they have been. They had to consider the broad range of possibilities – from written to unwritten constitutions, or a mix of both. They became fluent in terms such as entrenchment, supreme law. They considered the values that should be expressed, the structure and the processes, and the changing demographics of our New Zealand. The need for flexibility was acknowledged but also the need to guard against abuse of power by Parliament. The need to give certainty to the Treaty was recognised, and, finally, the need to give legitimacy to any constitution, and how best to do that.

All this has been a tall order for the participants who largely did not know each other prior to these two days. The more the talk went on over the two days, the higher the level of sophistication. There were differences of opinion, but no tempers, no angst.

And so I turn to those involved - the fifty young leaders who have drawn on a huge range of written and unwritten knowledge of our present and past constitutional provisions.

You rangatahi have been keenly conscious of those experts who have for decades tussled with constitutional issues. As Isaac Newton – one of the most influential scientists in history and famous for discovering the Laws of Gravity – said: "If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." You too were able to see further, because you were indeed standing on the shoulders of giants who had gone before you – the eminent parliamentary leaders of the past, but especially those of the present – among them, Sir Ken Keith, Sir Geoffrey Palmer and Matthew Palmer, and Philip Joseph who we were fortunate enough to have with us in the workshops.

You have not been daunted by the wealth of writing about the constitution, nor diverted by the words of experts with you. Instead you have bravely dared to propose new ways for the future. Nga Rangatahi - We applaud you.

You have crafted a daft constitution in two days and, when challenged this morning, you did not shrink from heading into workshops again to bring it near completion. The Constitution is no doubt an indicative one - an e-constitution that went to print only three hours ago – and it is appropriate that electronics eases the way in our modern world for such a document. Your constitution now stands as one that can be built on over time.

You have achieved - beyond our hopes - the outcome desired when the workshops were planned – that they would provide an ideal space to put minds and energies into addressing constitutional issues that have been signalled by government in the Constitutional Review. What you have done is more than is asked for in the Constitutional Review – you have pointed the way forward for New Zealand.

In the next year you young leaders will be among those who engage in and lead Constitutional Review discussions. In the next decades, we will be looking to you for the leadership that will take our country safely through this 21st century, and indeed towards another new century. Well before then, we will enjoy a New Zealand identity that we celebrate in our cultural diversity, one that is securely expressed in our constitutional structures and processes.

The workshops for you leaders are not the end of the road. You are our ambassadors – our kaiwhakahaere. Each of you committed yourself to ten hours of voluntary work when you agreed to participate in this two –day event. That’s 500 hours, no less, in total. And so you go out from here confident from your two-day workshops and the thinking that has gone into them. You have taken the time to become Informed about the pathways of constitutional change. You take with you a tool kit which you can draw on, as well as the knowledge that you can support each other. Filled with that energy and zest that can move mountains, you have such influence and powers which you can use in the various areas of our country that you live in.

Use your ten hours well – with your lecturers, your teachers, classmates, workmates, family and friends. Spread the word about the constitutional review questions and considerations that have exercised your creativity over this two days. Encourage people to grasp this unique opportunity to give their views and opinions on the sort of changes that could enhance our constitutional provisions and contribute to a better future for our national family of New Zealanders.

In terms of the Constitutional Review which will run through next year – I take the baton from you with excitement and a keen awareness of the huge challenge of helping to contributing to the national conversation.

I am greatly pleased that Te Papa is committed to playing its part and is well set up to do so as the national marae. It can be neutral ground for these forums of national significance and can assist others in mounting discussions. We might call on you to support us in our work too, as we bring new people on board in the many discussions that will occur over the next year. These are still to be planned but could include workshops, seminars, lectures, debates, panels.

As you go from here tonight let your voices be heard in the four corners of our nation! Continue to define and express a vision for our 21st century New Zealand. Dare to dream!

As Sir Paul Callaghan – scientist in nanotechnology and an inspired person - said¹:

Just imagine this country should the members of the diaspora start to come home, not just because we make the best coffee in the world, but because we have the most beautiful, stimulating and exciting place to live and work. That's a dream worth having.

Let's grasp that dream, build its foundations, take it where you will, run with it!

E hoa ma nga rangatahi:

Kia kaha, kia maia, kia Manawa nui

Be strong be steadfast, go for it!

¹ Paul Callaghan, p.171