

RACE, UNITY AND JUSTICE

Statement by youth and supporters who attended Race Unity Conference 2018

Racial prejudice is in our schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces. We are not satisfied with statements that New Zealand is 'less racist' than other countries. While some experience New Zealand as a friendly and inclusive society, too many of us experience New Zealand as an unwelcoming and exclusive place. What experience we have tends to depend on the colour of our skin or our accent, among other markers. Racial prejudice has influenced our institutions, our laws, and even the physical layout of our cities. The fact that Pākeha and people of colour are predominant in different neighbourhoods and schools helps reinforce existing divisions in society, and create unconscious biases that shape the way we think and act.

If we are to eradicate racial prejudice, we need to learn the history of Aotearoa. We need to learn about the injustices that were perpetrated, and that still limit our success and progress. We need to learn about the efforts that have been made to create justice, peace and unity – the non-violent resistance of Te Whiti and Tohu at Parihaka, for example. We need to learn about the policies of assimilation that our government implemented, and the misleading self-image of harmony and tolerance that has allowed us to forget the wrongs of the past. We need to acknowledge and honour this past, if we are to move forward together.

True unity cannot be achieved without justice. Justice requires balance – distributing resources in ways that allow all parts of our society to flourish. At times this means that we have to prioritise equity, rather than equality. If we want our society to flourish and be unified, we would do well to support initiatives that aim to restore the balance of our society, including those that reallocate economic, political and other resources.

Many institutional changes will be required if race relations are to become just and equitable. If our schools are to teach our history, we need not only curriculum change but education for our educators. If our criminal justice system is to be truly just, it will need to change to reflect the ethics and tikanga that New Zealanders value. Institutional change depends on making spaces for minority voices, and youth voices, to be heard and represented wherever power is exercised. Finally, we need to consider together how our constitution could be transformed to fully reflect te Tiriti o Waitangi in our institutions of government.

To achieve unity, we will also need to transform the culture of our communities. We will need to create both physical and social spaces where people of different backgrounds can mix, consult and befriend one another. We will need to make the celebration of different cultures a frequent feature of community life that touches all New Zealanders. And as our diversity becomes increasingly rich, we will need to continue discussing what our common identity as New Zealanders can, and should, become.

As individuals, we must be persistent, patient and understanding. We need to learn both to challenge racism when we see it, and to examine our own thoughts and behaviour. We must strive to be loving, forgiving, and we must be willing to learn. We can work towards overcoming our biases by befriending people who do not look like us or sound like us. This can start in our families, from the earliest years of our lives.

The statement summarises the views shared at **Race Unity Conference 2018**, held at Te Mahurehure Marae, Auckland on Saturday 13 May 2018. The Conference brought together around 60 youth and supporters to consult together about how race relations in New Zealand can become more unified and just. For further information, email aidan.macleod@bahai.org.nz.