



## New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils Inc.

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### PRESS RELEASE

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#### Federation Seeks a Multicultural Act for New Zealand

The national conference of the Council members of the New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils (NZFEC) was held in Christchurch over the weekend of February 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup>. Delegates from the twenty Ethnic Councils from around the country, representing the views of nearly 600 000 New Zealanders unanimously endorsed the request to Government to enact a Multicultural Act in New Zealand that is inclusive of all New Zealanders.

Pancha Narayanan, President of the Federation, presented at the meeting that this would ensure that every individual in New Zealand is equal, their heritage and history is nurtured and protected equally. The Federation principles are based on the fact that everyone in New Zealand has an ethnicity.

This Act if enacted will ensure that issues of ethnicity are put beyond politics. It would also mandate and assist all social, cultural, economic and political institutions to adopt an inclusive approach in their endeavours.

He drew parallels between the proposed NZ act and the Australian and Canadian Acts already in existence. These Acts address the three key areas of Cultural identity, Social justice and Economic efficiency.

Pancha Narayanan said that New Zealand's Multicultural Act if enacted would for the first time recognise completely (in legislation) the indigenous status of Maori, Treaty of Waitangi and all other mechanisms supporting Maori aspirations. NZFEC aims to begin dialogue with Maori to ensure that Maori interests are actively nurtured and safe guarded.

As first step, the Federation will seek meetings with member Councils, Iwi, community groups, Ministers and MPs to move this a step further towards legislation.

The conference was also attended by Minister for Ethnic Affairs Hon. Chris Carter, Associate Minister for Justice Hon. Lianne Dalziel, Pansy Wong (National MP), Nicky Wagner (National MP); Tim Barnett (MP Christchurch Central) Christchurch Deputy Mayor Norm Withers, Race Relations Commissioner Joris de Bres, Director of Ethnic Affairs Mervin Singham, Kerry Dalton, CEO of ACAB, Dibs Patel, Ministry of Youth. and Kumar Murali from Families Commission.

At the meeting, Race Relations Commissioner, Joris de Bres launched the 2007 Racial Discrimination Report highlighting existing issues as the race-hate crimes and discrimination figures showed a downward trend.

NZFEC acknowledged the goodwill and contribution of all New Zealanders for this positive trend while emphasising that discrimination still existed because the systems and processes in New Zealand had not kept up with international trends and practices.

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The Director of Ethnic Affairs Mervin Singham also presented the Ethnic Perspectives in Policy as part of the conference. It was acknowledged that adopting this perspective would eliminate institutional barriers that contributed to discrimination

The conference also noted that the downward trend with race-hate crimes and discrimination figures simply underlined that that New Zealand was not a racist country.

The meeting and conference was attended by delegates from all member ethnic councils of New Zealand, service agencies and the wider public.

The President also welcomed the newest ethnic council North Shore Ethnic Council as a full member.

The Federation of Ethnic Councils is an umbrella organisation of 18 Regional Ethnic Councils around New Zealand.

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