



Tēnā koutou katoa,

Mihi to mana whenua, kaumātua, kaikarakia, the Board and members present.

Brief introduction, Ko wai au, how I came into social work, my qualifying whilst working journey over the years, my mahi in academia prior to taking on this role, and the attraction of the role. Thank the Board for choosing to interview and sign up my dance card, I have some good dance moves.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

It is both an honour and a privilege to stand before you today as Kaihautū at the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW). My role, in conjunction with our Chief Executive, is to assist in meeting ANZASW's strategic objectives, with a particular focus on the needs of tangata whenua members and ensuring that the association's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is upheld in all our current and future aspirations and champion our responsiveness to Māori in social work. It is therefore the decolonising and indigenising of social work in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As Kaihautū, I am deeply committed to engaging with Māori members, actively listening to your voices, and ensuring that your insights shape our policies and practices and social work in Aotearoa. Last week I sent an email to all our tangata whenua members introducing myself and asking you all to complete a short survey. Please do this and encourage your hoa to complete. This will inform my priorities for the next 18 months. This outreach is not just a task; it is a vital aspect of how we can work together to address the systemic challenges we face.

Our collective mission is to create a profession that is responsive to the needs of all our communities, particularly Māori, and that reflects the values enshrined in our ANZASW Code of Ethics and the commitments our constitution makes to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and to tangata whenua.

My involvement in this journey acknowledges those who have walked and charted the path before me, those who had vision, drive, and commitment to improving our social work responses to Māori. It acknowledges the historical context that has shaped our profession. The release of Puaoteata in 1988 marked a critical moment in our understanding of social work, challenging the systemic racism and inequities faced by Māori communities. This report called for a radical transformation that centered Māori values and leadership — a mission we must continue with urgency and dedication today. It urged us to examine how our systems and practices have historically marginalized Māori and suggested radical change.

It certainly was pivotal to my development as a new social worker in 1989 and to honour the voices of those who stood to ensure their voices were heard, those cries of disenfranchisement, of pain were heard, as was the challenge to ensure our social work practices acknowledged the beauty of Te Ao Māori, a world of whakapapa, of whanaungatanga, of the mana of whānau, hapū and iwi to not only be involved but to lead social work in Aotearoa. We know of course Puaoteata was undermined, however it has continued to provide the inspiration to many of us in social work, Tangata whenua and Tangata Tiriti, as hoa haere, to continue the mahi.

As we navigate the present, we are confronted with ongoing injustices that disproportionately affect Māori. Inquiries of the Waitangi Tribunal in recent years into Oranga Tamariki, health, justice, the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care has highlighted the painful realities faced by our communities, exposing the ongoing impacts of systemic neglect and abuse. The stark disparities, inequities illuminated in various reports remind us of the urgent need for change, reinforcing that our commitment to tino rangatiratanga is not merely aspirational — it is essential for the well-being of all.

Currently, the political landscape poses significant challenges to our mission. The coalition government's proposed Treaty Principles Bill stands as a divisive force, seeking to redefine the principles of partnership in ways that undermine tino rangatiratanga and the rights of Māori. This legislation threatens to strip away the progress made in honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, sidelining the voices of those most affected by its implications. The implications of this bill echo beyond our profession, raising questions about our collective future as a society committed to justice and equity.

However, in the face of these challenges, we have a profound opportunity to galvanize our collective resolve. The injustices we see around us compel us to act and inspire us to challenge the status quo. As social workers, we are called to dismantle the systems that perpetuate racism and inequity, advocating for decolonization and the indigenizing of social work practices. This call is not limited to our profession; it extends to all systems and structures that have been shaped by colonialism. This is a worldwide movement for change, requiring us to rethink how we approach social justice and equity in a way that recognizes and honours Indigenous knowledge, rights, and governance.

Research and movements in Aotearoa and other Indigenous lands where settled colonialism has wreaked havoc and elsewhere globally, illustrate that the call to decolonize and indigenize necessitates a comprehensive shift in our systems. Frameworks developed by scholars and activists stress that true decolonization involves dismantling colonial structures and reimagining our societal frameworks. This includes not just our social work practice but also the policies and systems that govern education, health care, and justice. These movements demonstrate that when indigenous voices lead the way, entire communities benefit, reinforcing the idea that what is good for Māori is good for all.

When we uplift Māori communities, we contribute to the flourishing of our entire society. By honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we affirm the rights of tangata whenua and to a different system of being, knowing and doing. I suggest this also opens pathways for all marginalized groups to thrive. The connections between our struggles for justice must be recognised, for when one community rises, we all benefit.

The principles outlined in our ANZASW Code of Ethics serve as a compass, guiding our commitment to cultural safety, social justice, and respect for tangata whenua. By embracing these values, we affirm our responsibility to those we serve and reinforce the foundations upon which our practice is built. This includes acknowledging the intersections of oppression that many face, recognizing that issues such as racism, poverty, and inequity are interconnected and must be addressed collectively.

As we confront these systemic issues, we must also critically examine the influence of neoliberalism, which often prioritizes profit over people. This ideology has led to the commodification of essential services, neglecting the needs of those most vulnerable in our society. It perpetuates cycles of disadvantage and reinforces the very structures that marginalize Māori and other Indigenous communities.

Yet, in the midst of these challenges, there is hope. The rising awareness of social injustices and the movements advocating for change provide a fertile ground for transformative action. As social workers, we must be inspired to champion the rights of those we serve, advocating for policies that dismantle oppressive systems and promote equity.

As we reflect on our roles as social workers, let us draw inspiration from the challenges before us, stand firm in our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, justice, and social equity, and to creating a future where every individual is treated with respect and dignity.

As we move forward together, I invite you to reflect on two questions:

"How can we, as social workers in both our micro everyday social work practice and our mesa and macros spaces, continue to actively challenge the systemic inequities that undermine the tino rangatiratanga of Māori and work towards a future where Māori voices lead the way in shaping our social systems?"

"In what ways can we collectively stand against legislation like the Treaty Principles Bill to ensure that our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is not only upheld but strengthened, allowing for true partnership and empowerment of tangata whenua in our social work practice?"

I want to end with a whakatauki that requires us all to the task, we all have a role to play to uplift this Kaupapa. 'Ko koe ki tēnā, ko ahau ki tēnei kiwai o te kete' You to that handle of the kete and I'll take this handle kete. All hands to the kete – mahia te mahi!

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.