



PREAMBLE - MORIORI COVENANT OF PEACE

The abandonment of warfare and killing is an ancient covenant that has been handed down from the earliest Moriōri ancestors to have settled on Rēkohu and Rangihāute. Our karāpuna (ancestors) tell us that that the covenant was reaffirmed and passed from one generation to the next.

“It was passed down to Mu and Wheke, and from them and their descendants down to Rongomaiwhenua, and from him to his descendants Nunuku, Tapata and Torea. You may continue to fight; but the meaning of his words was, do not kill.” (1894 transcript)

By forbidding the taking of human life and placing their weapons of war upon the Tūahu (the sacred altar), Moriōri entered into a tohinga or covenant with their gods. From that time forward, power over life and death was removed from the hands of man and placed into the hands of their gods. Fighting became ritualised and upon the first blood being drawn fighting was to cease. The leader, Nunuku Whenua reaffirmed the covenant of peace some 600 hundred years ago. Moriōri as a people have continued to honour that covenant to this day despite the greatest of provocations.

Tradition informs us that the knowledge of the peace covenant was passed from father to son during a ceremony of rites and responsibilities. The old weapons which had been placed on the Tūahu were removed and handed to the child. An explanation was then given to the child that the weapons were once used for fighting and could kill another human being. By replacing the weapon back on the Tūahu, the child was symbolically renewing the covenant for the next generation and completing the tohinga ceremony.

AFFIRMATIONS OF THE COVENANT

This covenant was reaffirmed at a large gathering of Moriori at Te Awapatiki in early 1836, to decide what response they would make to the invasion of their Island home in 1835. While the young men urged resistance, the elders, Tapata and Torea insisted that the people hold fast to the teachings of Nunuku. As they said, the covenant was a spiritual pact entered into with their gods. To break that covenant would represent a betrayal of their gods and a loss of mana for them as a people. Instead, they offered peace, friendship and sharing of the Island's resources, as was their custom.

Despite the great suffering and loss that Moriori endured as a consequence of this decision, their legacy of peace and hope lived on. For this current generation of Moriori it has become the rallying point for our people. A beacon of light and inspiration that has guided us in reclaiming our culture and identity as a people - our identity as the first peoples of these islands. The covenant has been renewed at subsequent auspicious occasions – the opening of Kōpinga Marae (2005), the blessing for the World March for Peace and Non-Violence (2009) and at the inaugural Me Rongo Congress for Peace, Sustainability and Respect for the Sacred (2011).

ME RONGO CONGRESS

Me Rongo is a Moriori term meaning “in peace”. It is used as both a salutation and affirmation. The word “rongo” also embodies other vital ingredients for peaceful living, as rongo means “to listen”. Me Rongo implies that in order to be in peace, one must also listen, and listen deeply and respectfully. This listening is not just amongst people but also incorporates a deeper listening to the rhythms and sounds of the living systems of which we are a part.

In May 2010, a gathering was convened in Tofino Canada as part of the International Society of Ethnobiology's 12th International Congress¹. The Tofino gathering was conceived as a stepping stone in the lead up to the Me Rongo Congress planned for November 2011. The Tofino gathering was held in an indigenous centre and named **Hishuk-ish tsa'walk** after a Tla-o-qui-aht expression meaning “everything is one”.

The session (entitled “*Peace, Sustainability and Respect for the Sacred*”) brought together elders and other experts from around the world who have traditions in peace keeping/making as an integral part of their philosophy. It focussed on the importance of the preservation and transmission of inter-generational knowledge of “living in country” as the Aboriginal peoples of Australia say, and the maintenance and promotion of retention of the local language(s) and cultural practices of the communities that sustain this knowledge. At its heart was an understanding of the importance of the sacred/spiritual/wairua traditions – as an expression of the thread that binds people together with their natural worlds, and which provides the basis for living in a mutually respectful and mutually enhancing relationship of humans, plants and animals.

¹ <http://www.tbgf.org/ice/home>

In addition to providing a collective forum for learning about peace traditions and the importance of being able to practice cultural continuity, the session examined ways in which the modern world may come to a better understanding of how this sacred knowledge or knowledge of the sacred is critical to humankind (re)learning how to live "in connection with" rather than increasingly "disconnected from" our planet and planetary systems.

Me Rongo November 2011

The ***Me Rongo Congress 2011*** aimed to reunite people involved in the World March and the Tofino Peace gathering as well as others involved in peace-making or who have peace-making traditions, on Rēkohu in November 7-21, 2011.

At the opening of the *Me Rongo 2011 Congress* the covenant was renewed and reaffirmed by all delegates. In renewing this ancient covenant of peace we are conscious that peace is as precious and much needed today in the modern world as it was for our ancestors. The challenge left to us by our karāpuna is whether we can learn to live together peacefully and share what we have, respecting each other and the environment that we live in. The alternatives facing this world today do not bear too much contemplation. This ceremony, while honouring the vision of our ancestors, is also a small but important contribution to the efforts being made by peoples and organisations the world over to make our planet a more peaceful and sustainable place in which to live.

On 13 November 2011, the delegates of the inaugural *Me Rongo Congress* ratified the following Declaration:

ME RONGO DECLARATION

We believe that the creation of a meaningful and lasting, intergenerational practice of mindfulness is essential for establishing a culture of peace and non-violence. When you have hope for future generations, peace prevails.

We are convinced that the Moriori message of peace is something to be proud of and is worthy of sharing with the rest of the world, as an unbroken commitment over countless generations to peacekeeping, and as a beacon of hope. Moriori history on Rēkohu demonstrates that it is possible to consciously and successfully change from a culture that accepted occasional warfare and killing to one of peace and the outlawing of killing.

Our collective experience shows that in order for individuals, communities and states to recover from acts of violence or aggression, a process for meaningful reconciliation needs to occur. The destructive consequences otherwise are intergenerational. Work during *Me Rongo* highlighted the need to reconcile the sometimes competing values of peace, mercy, justice and truth(s) in order to eventually come to a place of reconciliation.

Our experience also shows that adoption of and adherence to values of peace and non-violence is not simply an option – it is a necessity - in a world of increasingly fragility. This also acknowledges

that peace is not simply absence of violence. Peace is contingent on the presence of justice, and the respect for and freedom of identity in our hearts, homes, communities, and across the Earth.

We are further convinced that there is a deep connection amongst notions of peace, ecological resilience, and reverence for human dignity, ritual practices and sacred places: thus the connections at *Me Rongo 2011* between “peace, sustainability and respect for the sacred”.

We believe that creative people and cultures in our communities have the capacity to shine a light on truths and the potential for healing through the arts. Artists, poets, writers, musicians and those with the capacity of insight should be valued and respected accordingly. *Me Rongo 2011* has recognised this by incorporating the work of artists and their teachings as a protective cloak for this Congress.

We further believe that the year 2011 marks a time of great hope. Global awakenings, and demonstrations of civil societies have shown the hunger for lives of freedom, without fear, want and discrimination – a birthright for all citizens of this planet.

We are aware that this planet is in need of multiple, effective mechanisms for achieving peaceful, non-violent conflict resolution. Conflicts are inevitable in human society, and all cultures strive to evolve nonviolent ways of dealing with them. We affirm the importance of deepening these ways to healing as part of our commitment to non-violence.

This declaration is based on an awareness that the establishment of a culture of peace and non-violence is not an end in itself. Peace is a condition that needs to be constantly worked on. The values stated in this declaration are a step in the larger process of achieving a world without violence.

We, the delegates of *Me Rongo 2011*:

- i. Reaffirm our commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly, 10 December 1948 (which is now honoured as ‘Human Rights Day’) and the legally binding human rights instruments that have arisen from it;
- ii. Reaffirm our commitment to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the General Assembly, 13 September 2007;
- iii. Reaffirm a commitment to the Charter for a World Without Violence approved by the 7th World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates in December 2007;
- iv. Endorse the UNESCO Declaration and Programme of action on a Culture of Peace adopted on 13 September 1999;
- v. Endorse the Vancouver Declaration of 11 February 2011 on Law’s Imperative for the Urgent Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World;
- vi. Support the spirit of the draft Code of Crimes against Future Generations prepared by the World Future Council);

- vii. Support those seeking laws and governance to prevent the destruction of our planet by adding the crime of “ecocide” to the existing categories of “crimes against peace” (i.e. genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and crimes of aggression).

We, the delegates of *Me Rongo 2011* ask the global community of individuals, governments, nation states, educational and scientific communities and collectives such as the United Nations to adopt and endorse the following principles:

1. **Hokomenetai – unity.** Through the gathering together of collective will, knowledge and determination steps towards achieving goals of peace and non-violence will be more easily achieved.
2. **Sharing.** Working as a collective is only successful if participants agree to openly and ethically share their knowledge, energy and experience. Adherence to this principle requires active listening (rongo) to the aspirations, concerns and needs of others.
3. **Active participation for non-violence.** We know that violence begets violence. The increasing normalisation of violence through the media, violent games, and through warfare and terrorism is unacceptable. To end this we need to ensure that individual human dignity is respected, unconditionally. We must also acknowledge that the need to show respect is a requirement of all of us. Changing the passive acceptance of violence is an urgent task and precious gift for future generations
4. **Pluralism.** We live in a plural world where co-existence is an inherent responsibility of life as human beings. Pluralism embraces and energetically engages with diversity in all its expressions and is a powerful force in affirming all cultural and communal quests for peace and understanding. In this sense it moves past ‘tolerance’ to actively seeking understandings across difference(s).
5. **Peace education.** Teaching about peace, non violence and peaceful conflict resolution needs to be promoted for all ages in all levels of our education systems.
6. **Protecting and valuing natural resources.** We recognise that warfare and conflict is often a result of disputes over natural resources or a result of being deprived of adequate natural resources and lands. In order to have a peaceful relationship with our planet we must recognise that humans are part of an interconnected system, and demonstrate respect for all components of our global ecosystem.

7. **Freedom of identity.** We recognise that this freedom is essential for peace to flourish. Individuals, communities and nation states need to be able to practice and use their own languages, cultural practices and traditions. They also need the right to live, safely, on their home lands.

8. **Protect and respect our sacred spaces and places.** These places have the capacity to heal and restore the human spirit, as well as natural processes. In order to care for these places and values we must hold dear and safeguard traditional practices of reverence.

9. **Protect and respect for Indigenous rights, values and teachings.** Most indigenous communities have traditions of deep connection with the Earth and its rhythms and systems. Ensuring that these are valued alongside other knowledge systems is critical for the survival of Earth.

10. **Nurture and cherish artists, poets, writers, musicians, spiritual leaders and visionaries.** These people are treasures in our communities and through their skills have the capacity to reveal truths and deeper understandings. They also have the potential to enable healing as well as link people together through common interests, aspirations and enjoyment.

11. **Promote research and dialogue on conflict resolution.** The promotion of research and deep discussion on peace and conflict resolution should be supported financially and philosophically so as to enhance its place in our academic and vocational arenas. Our poets, philosophers, teachers, wise elders and artists in general should be encouraged to join us in this endeavour.

Glossary of Moriori Terms Used in this Document

Moriori word	English meaning
Hokomenetai	To gather together in unity
Karāpuna	Ancestors
Kōpinga marae	Kōpinga means a grove of kōpi trees. These were traditional places where the Moriori gathered to debate, celebrate and commemorate events. Kōpi is native to the island but is a tropical tree brought with the first Polynesian settlers to the island (<i>Corynocarpus spp</i>) A marae is a traditional, communal gathering place
Mana	Integrity and honour
Rangihaute	Moriori name for the smaller of the two main islands of the Chathams, also known as Pitt Island
Rēkohu	Moriori name for the Chatham Islands – their indigenous home lands
Rongo (Me Rongo)	Rongo means peace as well as ‘to listen’. Me Rongo (in peace) is also a salutation, suitable for all occasions
Te Awapatiki	Literally ‘the path of the flounder’. This is the location of the outlet to Te Whānga Lagoon on Rēkohu and where the elders met to lay down the covenant of peace and then, in 1836, to debate whether to uphold it still
Tohinga	Covenant and also a baptism or dedication rite
Tūahu	Altar, sacred place for ritual practices