

¹ The [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) was discussed at every [hui](#) held by [Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#) (the Independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation) and was referred to in most of the written submissions received. Although [the Crown](#) has attempted to downplay its importance (after initially declining to recognise it at all) it continues to have growing resonance.

Because a number of [Māori](#) contributed to the drafting of the Declaration, many of our people understand its relevance here as well as overseas. It is perhaps the most well-known of all international human rights' instruments, and those involved in its drafting were often referred to.



The respected kuia [Erihapeti Murchie](#) was one of those who was actively involved in the early drafting stages. At a crucial point in the process in 1992 she stated –

"As [Ngāi Tahu](#) and as a Māori I see the Declaration as an international expression of the rights we have through [whakapapa](#) and [the treaty](#).

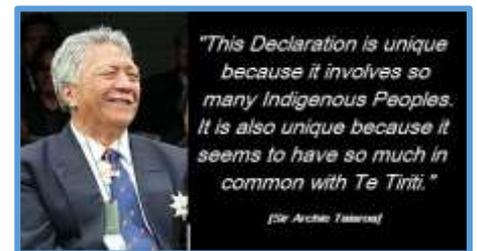
"As an indigenous woman I see it as the first ever international statement about the minimum human rights standards that apply to Indigenous Peoples, including indigenous women and children. From both points of the view the Declaration will enable us to claim back the right of self-determination and give our people international reassurance that tino rangatiratanga has a political as well as a cultural meaning."

For several years one of the [rangatira](#) who accompanied the Māori delegation to drafting sessions of the Declaration was [Sir Archie Taiaroa](#). He also saw the links between the Declaration and [Te Tiriti](#) as well as its particular relevance to the [constitutional change hui](#) which were being held at [Hīrangī](#) during the 1990s

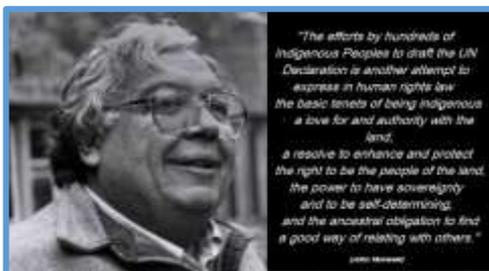
"I am reminded of the times when [our old people travelled](#) to London and even to what was then called the [League of Nations in Geneva](#) to get pressure put on the Crown to honour the treaty.

"Well we are back here now but in different circumstances, and this time we are drafting something, this Declaration, which is unique because it involves so many Indigenous Peoples. It's also unique because it seems to have so much in common with Te Tiriti.

"It seems that at last the work of all those people who travelled to Europe might be bearing fruit. If it does, then the Declaration could sit alongside the treaty and maybe the discussions at Hīrangī might lead to further kōrero in the future."



Matike Mai similarly saw the Declaration as an international expression of what [tino rangatiratanga](#) means in political and constitution terms, and they agreed with the view of the Native American jurist [John Mohawk](#) –



"The efforts by hundreds of Indigenous Peoples to draft the UN Declaration is another attempt to express in human rights law the basic tenets of being indigenous – a love for and authority with the land, a resolve to enhance and protect the right to be the people of the land, the power to have sovereignty and to be self-determining, and the ancestral obligation to find a good way of relating with others ...

"Because of our history it also means helping us recover from centuries of dispossession by stating to the world who we are and what we are entitled to ... by declaring the human rights, the humanity, that colonisation has for too long denied us."

We will consider the UN Declaration further next week.

¹ Nineteenth edited extract from pp. 60 – 61 of [He Whakaaro Here Whakaamu Mō Aotearoa – The Report of Matike Mai o Aotearoa](#)