# **UNANZ Agenda 2030 – Panel discussion**

***Panel session: Ensuring Human Rights and Democracy***

*Presented by Vanisa Dhiru, 28 September 2023*

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rangatira mā

Tēnā koutou katoa.

Mo to mihi whakatau Martine, kia ora.

Nga mihi kia korua ko Ibrahim, raua ko Suzanne mo o korero i tenei ra.

He uri ahau no India

Ko Gujarat te rohe

Ko Ava Falia te iwi

Ko Patel te hapu

I whānau mai au i te taha o te awa o Manawatū

I raro i te maru o te maunga o Ruahine

Kei to noho au kei Te Whanganui a Tara

Ko Vanisa Dhiru toku ingoa.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

I’d like to acknowledge the land of the rohe I stand on today, Te Atiawa, Taranaki Whanui. Kia ora.

Thank you Karim and the team at UNANZ for your kind invitation to share on this topic today, on this panel.

Today I am here in my capacity as the Communication and Information Commissioner for the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO.

***NZ National Commission for UNESCO***

The NZ National Commission ensures the permanent presence of UNESCO in Aotearoa New Zealand.

As a country founded on Te Tiriti o Waitangi and as a foundation member of UNESCO – we were the second country to sign up to the UNESCO constitution back in 1946.

The Commission represents and promotes Aotearoa New Zealand's interests, while contributing to the development of UNESCO strategic priorities and programmes.

Our mission is to: Deepen connections between the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and UNESCO globally through the sharing of ideas and building capability for a better and more peaceful future.

***UNESCO Human rights and democracy***

On the topic of this panel - Human rights and democracy - the topics are at the heart of UNESCO’s mandate.

UNESCO was the first UN agency to place the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) at the core of its action.

Since its inception, UNESCO has sought to promote the aspirations of all people, to strive for the realisation of shared universal values, such as tolerance, pluralism, the respect of human rights, freedom and dialogue.

Of the many things we do, UNESCO celebrates numerous international days and weeks of significance. This month, we have celebrated the International Day of Democracy.

The International Day of Democracy (15 September) provides an opportunity to review the state of democracy in the world. Democracy is as much a process as a goal, and only with the full participation of and support by the international community, national governing bodies, civil society and individuals, can the ideal of democracy be made into a reality to be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere.

Democracy demands that we uphold the principles of “dignity, equality and [...] respect” of human beings - principles which are enshrined in our Constitution – as noted this month by Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO.

UNESCO promotes the basic human right to education; the right to participate in a cultural life; the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications; the right to water and sanitation; and the right to freedom of expression, information and privacy.

However today - we celebrate the UN International Day for Universal Access to Information.

This day was established to protect and promote access to information as a fundamental human right and an essential step towards attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. As mentioned, fitting day for us to meet to discuss Agenda 2030, and a fitting day to be discussing human rights and democracy.

Information is power. Therefore, universal access to information is a cornerstone of healthy and inclusive knowledge societies. Having access to info supports human rights and democracy.

***Freedom of Expression***

Universal access to information means that everyone has the right to seek, receive and impart information. This right is an integral part of the right to freedom of expression.

One of the key focus areas of the Commission is our Freedom of Expression work, driven by the goal to promote diversity and inclusion to ensure an increased understanding of human rights that leads to a more inclusive society for all.

There are two outcomes we describe as what we want to see from the work we do and support:

* Celebrate and support diversity and social inclusion In Aotearoa New Zealand
* Recognising the obligations and responsibilities in relation to Freedom of Expression.

At the National Commission we work towards promoting Freedom of Expression in a number of ways.

* By supporting initiatives by stakeholder and community groups that address discrimination, hate speech, mis and disinformation to support diversity, intersectionality and inclusion in Aotearoa New Zealand (e.g Race Unity National Hui that happens alongside the Race Unity National Speech Awards).
* By actively engaging with UNESCO networks and partners to share work and practice, on diversity and inclusion to support communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.
* We also support people in Aotearoa to attend and engage in international meetings and forums.
* And we share relevant UNESCO publications domestically, particularly those relating to addressing mis, dis and mal -information, hate speech and conspiracy theories.

We support the work of UNESCO in emphasising the role of education, analytical skills, development, digital media literacy and digital platform governance in combating mis and disinformation and hate speech, both on and offline.

We will continue to add our voices, be that our Commissioners, UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders or our Secretariat, to relevant events and korero that address mis and disinformation, hate speech and discrimination, across the motu.

***Youth voice***

I raise the role of our youth voice, as I reflect back on the theme of International Day of Democracy, which this year was, “Empowering the next generation”. It focused on young people’s essential role in advancing democracy and ensuring that their voices are included in the decisions that have a profound impact on their world.

We have a team of youth leaders at the Commission - the UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders - a group of around 10 young people aged between 18 and 25 who serve as advisors, negotiating inclusive ways for young people to be engaged and empowered in the National Commission’s priority and programme areas.

As UNESCO ambassadors and change agents, the youth leaders work to build UNESCO’s profile and identify where they can drive, support and/or collaborate with organisations, networks and initiatives that align with UNESCO’s mandate.

This advisory team supports us in our work partnering with our communities to help stimulate conversations about human rights.

Our Freedom of Responsible Expression work builds on insights from the National Youth Diversity Forum which was held in Christchurch in 2019 (in partnership with Ngai Tahu and the Human Rights Commission). This was followed by a ‘[Youth Declaration Call For Action](https://unesco.org.nz/assets/general/UNE-0479-UNESCO-Youth-Diversity-Forum-Paris-booklet_WEB-003.pdf)’ which called for individual as well as community and institutional change. The Declaration was presented to UNESCO at the 40th General Conference in Paris.

Ensuring our many and diverse communities have access to information, including raising awareness around mis and disinformation, underlines our work here at the National Commission.

***Conclusion***

I’d like to conclude with a whakatauki for this contribution on the panel - from Kīngi Pōtatau Te Wherowhero:

"Kotahi te kōhao o te ngira, e kuhuna ai te miro mā, te miro whero, te miro pango.”

There is but one eye of the needle through which white, red and black thread must go.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.