

Holocaust Remembrance Speech 2023 – Vanisa Dhiru (Theme - Acts of defiance & heroism)

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rangatira mā
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa
(To all authorities, all voices, to the many chiefs gathered here
Greetings, greetings, greetings to everyone)

Tēnā koe Matua Kura, mō tō mihi whakatau.

Ko Ruahine te maunga

Ko Manawatu te awa

No India ōku tūpuna

Ko Aavfada Falia te iwi

Ko Patel to hapu

(Ka) Te Whanganui a Tara ahau e noho ana

Ko Vanisa Dhiru toku ingoa.

Tena katou tena katou katou.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. The New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO has actively participated in the commemoration of Holocaust Remembrance Day for many years now, and our commitment to this important day remains as strong as ever. As Communication and Information Commissioner, I am honoured to be able to speak on behalf of the Commission this year.

UNESCO established Holocaust Remembrance Day to pay tribute to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and to reaffirm its unwavering commitment to counter antisemitism, racism, and other forms of intolerance that may lead to group-targeted violence.

At the National Commission, this commitment is at the heart of our work, and is the reason that we have identified Freedom of Responsible Expression as one of our priority areas.

Part of our work at the Commission involves providing funding to events that support our priority areas – today being one of those events. We have also supported for many years the Race Unity Speech Awards and Hui.

The Speech Awards are a platform for senior high school students to express their ideas on how we can improve race relations in Aotearoa. The Speech Awards give eloquent and thoughtful young people a chance to speak their minds and give the rest of New Zealand a chance to listen to the leaders of tomorrow.

I have been privileged to attend these Speech Awards over the past few years on behalf of the Commission. Having a platform that amplifies the voices of our youth is integral to enabling and promoting freedom of expression in Aotearoa.

In attendance today with me is Aimee Clark a UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leader. We also have members of our Youth Leader whānau attending events around the motu.

Our UNESCO Aotearoa Youth Leaders serve as advisors, negotiating inclusive ways for young people to be engaged and empowered in the National Commission's priority and programme areas.

Our Youth Leaders are integral connectors between our work and their local communities.

The words they hear today that resonate with them, will be words that they relay back into their communities, through their extensive and diverse networks. They bring with them too the words and sentiments of their communities.

They and the communities they represent are our future heroes that will continue to defy and correct the misinformation that is rampant in our communities.

Misinformation that **breeds** racism, antisemitism and other forms of intolerance.

Misinformation that **undoes** the work of those who have been our past heroes.

Misinformation that **muddies the water** of the acts of defiance that helped move our world in the right direction.

Within my role as Communications and Information Commissioner, I work with our Secretariat to identify opportunities to enable the Freedom of Responsible Expression within Aotearoa, to grow awareness of the importance of (it) Freedom of Responsible Expression and to continue to grow platforms where the voices of our diverse community are heard.

In a UNESCO context, Freedom of [Responsible] Expression encompasses the: “free flow of ideas by word and image that contributes to peace, sustainability, poverty eradication and human rights”.

Our approach is to work in **partnership** with communities to support freedom of responsible expression. We want to bring together civil society and communities to discuss ways to celebrate diversity through an increased understanding of human rights and supporting a more inclusive society for all.

With our borders reopening this year, members of the Commission have once again been able to travel overseas to progress this work through our international networks. One such opportunity I had was to travel to Utah and contribute to the 29th Annual International Law and Religion Symposium, where I spoke on religion’s role in building peace in New Zealand communities.

Today everyone that has spoken and shared here and at makara about story telling. What I would like to say is No story is worth forget the acts of heroism and activism that changed the lives of many, and know those stories will continue to change lives of our future generations and our treasured tamariki.

Many of our speakers today who might be a bit younger than the rest of us - they’ve shared stories with humility and passion.

We listen with that same passion, whether uncomfortable or not.

Minister Grant Robertson said here, we must retell and repeat these stories.

Our Commission works to deepen connections between the people of Aotearoa New Zealand and UNESCO globally through the sharing of ideas and building capability for a sustainable, healthy and more peaceful future.

In supporting this important event, we look to remember, learn, share ideas and recognise those acts of defiance and heroism that have bettered the lives of many, often at the sacrifice of their own.

We look to the future, our youth, to continue to speak freely and openly, to defy what is wrong, and to be our future heroes to enable antisemitism, racism, and other forms of intolerance that may lead to group-targeted violence, to not be a part of the future.

Let me leave you today with this whakatauki to reflect on -

Kia whakatomuri te haere whakamua

I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.

I acknowledge you all here today, but especially to our Holocaust survivors and whanau, those with the greatest connections.

Om shanti, Om Shanti

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katou.