

Chair in peace and conflict studies established

A Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies being established at Otago University is a first step towards a national peace centre.

Prime Minister Helen Clark announced the chair's establishment on 26 October and the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace & Conflict Studies Centre Trust held a one-day symposium in Auckland on Saturday 27 October to mark the step.

These initiatives follow more than two years' work by a dedicated group of people, including former Waikato law dean Professor Margaret Bedggood.

A discussion in January 2005 between Professor Bedggood, Dorothy Brown and Chris Barfoot led to them working to see a New Zealand Peace and Conflict Resolution Centre based at one university and delivering courses at others.

Meanwhile, unknown to this group, the Moriori people of Rekohu (Chatham Islands), also in January 2005 at the opening of their Kopinga Marae on Rekohu, had announced their intention to establish an international centre for peace studies based around their ancient covenant of peace.

Wellington barrister and vice-chair of the Hokotehi Moriori Trust, Maui Solomon, subsequently approached the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace & Conflict Studies Centre Trust to discuss working together on establishing a centre for peace and conflict studies in New Zealand.

The two groups agreed that such a centre would be strengthened by being fully inclusive of indigenous traditions of peacekeeping, which, in the case of Moriori, extend back over 500 years.

Meetings around the country in 2005 confirmed support, a steering group was formed and the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust was established.

Its aim is "to establish in Aotearoa New Zealand a designated, well-funded Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies that brings together research, teaching, tikanga, theory and practice and provides a focal point for New Zealand universities, teachers, students, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers".

Negotiations with universities have seen a memorandum of understanding and deed of gift signed by the trustees with the University of Otago. This will initially provide for the establishment of a Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies, as the first step towards setting up the national peace centre. The MOU also provides for the development of "strong partnerships" with "tangata whenua peace centres" in Aotearoa including Moriori, Parihaka, Ngai Tahu and other iwi and hapu who wish to become involved.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust has contributed \$1,250,000 towards establishing the chair and the Government has matched this amount under its "leading thinkers" scheme with Otago University.

Phase two will see the trust seek more money "so that we can grow and endow further lecturing positions", says the Trust's latest progress report.