In 1999 the then Race Relations Conciliator, Rajen Prasad, initiated a process of public consultation called *Agenda New Zealand*. People were asked their opinion on the present national challenges to long term positive race relations, their vision of the future direction of race relations, and how this could be achieved. The purpose was to “generate a national race relations strategy which would be a flexible but clear, collectively owned reference point for the future”. There was widespread public participation in the process.

With the merger of the Human Rights Commission and the Race Relations Office, the resulting strategy will now form part of the National Plan of Action for Human Rights which the new Human Rights Commission is developing under the amended Human Rights Act.

The 1999 consultation identified eight key race relations issues. They were national identity, personal attitudes, immigration, the media, education, economic and social disparity, institutional racism and the Treaty of Waitangi. A number of suggestions were made as to how these issues could be addressed. A summary is available on the Human Rights Commission website.

I intend to discuss some of these issues in this address, but I want to stress at the outset that I do so in the context of what I see as a relatively positive race relations climate. We have come a long way in the past few decades on issues like the Treaty, immigration policy, cultural diversity and central and local government responsiveness to diverse communities. It is by no means as bad as it sometimes looks in the media. Compared to many other countries, we have an excellent basis in the Treaty for the relationship between the indigenous people and the government; we have government agencies to address the particular needs of Maori, Pacific and ethnic groups, institutions to address Treaty grievances, and a tradition of resolving our differences peacefully. We have an evolving New Zealand identity that ties us all to our unique landscape and the Pacific Ocean around us. When facing the world and our visiting tourists, we point with pride to Maori culture and our multicultural traditions, as well as our natural assets. In many respects, we are the envy of other countries trying to grapple with their own race relations frameworks and policies. When their representatives visit, they remark on the ease and good humour of our interpersonal relationships. While there continue to be differences between Maori and Pakeha perspectives on some of the issues, it is a difference of degree rather than a polar opposition, and there is an increasing amount of dialogue between the two. It is the extreme views at both ends of the spectrum that sometimes cloud the growth of understanding that is taking place.
Underlying this dialogue are three fundamental and interconnected challenges. The first is the degree to which we are informed and in agreement about our history, the second is the articulation of a common vision of our future arising from that history, and the third is the development of a shared contemporary vocabulary with which to talk about these issues.

**A shared contemporary vocabulary**
Let me start with the vocabulary. We are reasonably clear as to what is meant by Maori (as designating people of a particular line of descent, even if they also have Pakeha forbears). We are also clear that many Maori chiefs signed a treaty with the British Crown. We recognize that the British Crown effectively became the New Zealand government, and that Treaty obligations to Maori are thus the responsibility of the government. Sometimes, however, we still fall into the trap of trying to ascribe that responsibility to individual citizens and private organisations, rather than to the government as it was intended. We are not so clear about what became of the British. As Maori did in New Zealand, so the British too continued to evolve in Europe after 1840. Most of the Irish formed a separate state, and the Scots and the Welsh have asserted their own national identities and achieved a degree of self-government. As a result of the decolonization process, Britain divested itself of its empire, became one member among others of the Commonwealth, and is now well into the process of integrating more closely with continental Europe. What has proved elusive is a collective term to reflect the diversity of what used to be British, Europeans and Australians, but now also comprises people from the Pacific, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and pretty well everywhere else on earth. No-one really likes to have their identity defined as “other” or “non”. While “Maori and Pakeha” was until recent times a widely accepted description of the New Zealand population dynamic, the term Pakeha now sits less easily with the Pacific peoples, Asians and Africans who have joined us, since it is associated in the public mind with people of European descent. Some New Zealanders of European descent dislike it as well, although personally I don’t share that view. The Statistics Department struggles to find a useful terminology to describe us to ourselves.

Perhaps we have lost our way a little in trying to use old words to accommodate new realities. Perhaps we need to update them, or at least update their meaning in the popular mind. Perhaps we will continue to need different terms to describe different relationships and circumstances.

The absence of a single positive descriptor for non-Maori New Zealanders does make it difficult for us to agree on what we mean by “bi-cultural”. In terms of language, it means Maori and English. At an institutional level, it is still evolving. Coming here from the Netherlands in the 1950’s, it was still apparent to my family that New Zealand was a Maori and British country. But there is a difference between talking about a country, its official languages and institutions, and its people. New Zealand may have been, and still be, bi-cultural in the former sense, but we can hardly claim that all our people are. Many Maori (although by no means all) are probably equally at home in both New Zealand cultures than the rest of us. Some of us even prickle at the correct pronunciation of Maori words or the use of Maori language in public,
and describe those who do make the effort as politically correct try-hards. While many non-British migrants are bicultural, and this is a good thing, they are not so in terms of the New Zealand context of Maori and English.

We tend to use “bi-cultural” in too loose a fashion to refer both to our nation and to individual citizens. I prefer the words “Treaty-based nation” and “diverse society”.

The term multicultural, or multiethnic, is seen by some as a more comfortable alternative to bicultural. While it addresses the problem of defining the greater diversity of the non-Maori population, it also threatens to dilute the importance of Maori as the indigenous people or tangata whenua of New Zealand.

The term “multicultural” is used in many countries, but it has a different meaning and context for example in Britain, Europe, Canada, the United States, South Africa and even Australia than it does in New Zealand. We need to explore that difference. If we do use it, we need to be clear about what we mean by it here in New Zealand. That meaning has to be drawn from our own history and evolution, not from elsewhere.

**The challenge of our history**

That brings me to the question of our history. In a very perceptive and challenging contribution to the recent Knowledge Wave conference, Simon Upton contended that we have “a dysfunctional national story or narrative”, and that this is a problem that will require remarkable leadership. He called for a reappraisal of the way we teach history in our schools, noting that there is “no prescribed minimum that every New Zealand child will encounter that puts him or her in touch with their national roots and national identity”, and that it seems “entirely possible that children can leave school without any comprehensive knowledge of the basic narrative of our nation”. He said:

“...A crucial element of leadership in New Zealand must involve learning how to recount our national story in a way that everyone can own and in a way that can enfold those who arrive here. Otherwise we risk becoming incomprehensible both to one another and to the rest of the world. And those who might have thought of joining us will be left shaking their heads and asking how we could have allowed ourselves to become so complicated and so dysfunctional. Healthy views of history are histories that people with no part in them can acquire and make their own. Histories that are pathological are histories no-one seeks to own, except those who invented them. The leadership challenge for all of us is to develop a national history that we can all recount. Our generation cannot re-write, let alone re-live the past. But it contains more than enough goodwill and trust to give us confidence in building our nation’s future.”

UNESCO New Zealand said in its recent newsletter that “In post-colonial countries, such as New Zealand, all peoples, whether descendants of the colonizers or the colonized, are on a journey of coming to terms with their shared history.”
National identity
We need an agreed vocabulary and a broadly accepted narrative of our past to develop and agree on a vision for our future. That is what Agenda New Zealand identified as the issue of national identity, and I believe it is one of the most important issues facing us. It presents a challenge to our historians, to government, to the cultural and heritage sector, to the education sector and, at the local level, to our councils in rediscovering, highlighting and celebrating the stories of our places and our peoples where we can most easily identify with them. And it presents a challenge to us all.

This is part of what we will need to talk about in the context of the National Plan of Action for Human Rights. I do not seek to pre-empt the outcome of the public discussion, but I would like to put forward a view as a contribution to that debate. I unashamedly look at our history from a contemporary New Zealand geopolitical perspective. It goes like this:

1. Two peoples, one of Asia-Pacific origin (Maori), and one of European origin (British) formed the basis of modern New Zealand. Maori were here first, and are the indigenous people of New Zealand, who embraced the landscape with their language and culture.

2. Maori chiefs and the British Crown signed the Treaty of Waitangi, which provided for peaceful settlement of British citizens and others, gave Maori access to world resources, technology and overseas ideas after a long period of geographical isolation, protected their own lands and cultural heritage, provided a mechanism for voluntary land transfer, and established a constitutional, governance, or partnership relationship between Maori (as the indigenous people) and the British Crown (as the government of New Zealand).

3. New Zealand after 1840 was a British colony, and shared a colonial history and administration with other parts of the British Empire of the time. The Treaty distinguished New Zealand from other colonies in terms of the relationship between the indigenous people and the colonial government. The practice of government, however, and hence the conflict between Maori and the government, may in part be explained by the practice of colonial government and administration in other British colonies (with whom we shared many administrators), particularly those with significant British settlement.

4. The nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth were essentially about the relationship between Maori and the British, but the latter half of the twentieth century saw the population significantly augmented by other peoples from the Asia-Pacific region, on the one hand, and other peoples from the European region on the other. Smaller numbers also came from Africa and the Americas.

5. The fundamental constitutional arrangement between Maori as the indigenous people and the New Zealand government as in effect the successor to the British Crown remains. Today New Zealand is therefore constitutionally a Treaty-based nation, with a diverse population (including Maori) made up of people from all modern
regions of the world – the Pacific, Asia, Europe, the Americas and Africa.

This highlights five highly relevant areas for the study of our national story: the arrival of Maori and Pakeha and their respective origins, their encounter and the signing of the Treaty, the colonial period (including the international context), our decolonization, and the arrival of new waves of people from Oceania, Asia and elsewhere. If such a view of our history is accepted (and no doubt there will be debate about that), then we also have the makings of a vision for our future as a nation:

• originating in its modern form from the engagement of two cultures, Maori and British
• based on the Treaty of Waitangi which established a special relationship between Maori and the Government
• comprising people and cultures from all major regions of the world.

Someone has referred to us as “One Nation, Two Partners and Many Peoples.” We could call ourselves a small “United Nation”, located in the Pacific, and our values would include such things as a commitment to the rights of indigenous people, equal opportunity, fairness, tolerance, the peaceful resolution of difference, creativity, entrepreneurship, innovation, prosperity, healthy living, sporting excellence, and a love of and connection with our unique natural terrestrial and marine environment.

The Statistics Department might be able to collect information that helps us to see the trajectory of our evolution as peoples from the five major regions of the world, identifying us as Pacific, Asian, European, American and African, identifying our countries of origin or descent, which in our further evolution will be as diverse and mixed as those of Maori from different iwi, hapu and other regions and countries. We would be using a whakapapa statistical model derived from the everyday practice of Maori in establishing connections with each other. It has proved robust for them.

Fortuitously, the visual image for this year’s Race Relations Day is a hand with the slogan “Hands up for kiwis of every race and place, Ringa tu mo nga iwi katoa”. The hand may be a rich source of imagery for our “united nation”, with the five fingers representing the five regions of the world. Through a constitutional lens, Maori might be seen as the thumb, which together with the other fingers gives the hand its amazing flexibility, power and dexterity. The thumb has both a unique place in the composition of the hand, and is an integral part of it. A digital picture, based on e-quality.

The recent Knowledge Wave conference revived discussion of a goal for New Zealand of regaining a place in the top ten countries of the OECD in economic performance. The conference itself focused strongly on the value of diversity and the unique place of Maori. Maybe our vision should be to be a world leader in the quality of life (based on our best traditions), rather than solely in economic performance.
If we can achieve a greater national consensus on our past and such a vision of our national identity and direction for the future, then perhaps a lot of the other issues that Agenda New Zealand identified and that trouble us might be seen in a clearer light. For example, we might feel a greater sense of pride that both Maori and English are official New Zealand languages. We might see in a more positive light the government’s recognition of particular constitutional obligations to iwi, hapu and evolving Maori political structures deriving from the Treaty. We might see the positive advantages of becoming a world leader in the relationship between indigenous people and government. We might embrace the notion that particular actions are required to ensure that Maori as well as Pakeha heritage and culture is protected, fostered, respected and celebrated. Being in greater agreement about our past, we might more readily be able to draw out the positive contribution that all peoples have made.

There is an excellent feature in this month’s Air New Zealand magazine on “Being Maori Today”, which is introduced to a national and international readership as follows:

“How can you talk about being Maori in New Zealand today? How do we both acknowledge conflict – and it would be wrong to deny there had been conflict between the Maori and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent) – and celebrate success? As we put together this issue of Air New Zealand magazine, these are some of the questions we asked ourselves. We wanted to acknowledge the past, but not dwell on it. We wanted to look to the future, to indicate ways Maori people are contributing to the New Zealand we’re all living in.

With that in mind, the path this story was going to take became clear to us. We decided to take six outstanding New Zealanders of Maori descent to talk about how their heritage shaped their lives. We knew that we wouldn’t always be telling happy stories. But that didn’t matter – we also knew that whatever they had to tell us, the individuals in the following pages have enriched all of our lives immeasurably.”

Priorities for the Race Relations Commissioner
Pending further dialogue on the development of our national identity, there are plenty of other issues to occupy the mind of a Race Relations Commissioner. To give these some sort of order, I have identified four key areas of focus for my work. Two of these are the longstanding touchstones of New Zealand race relations – firstly, the relationship between Maori, the government and all New Zealanders, and secondly, immigration. The third is the promotion of cultural diversity. The fourth is to ensure that the new Human Rights Commission lives up to its promise, and that its role in human rights and race relations is understood.
Maori, the Government and all New Zealanders

We need to be clear that while iwi and hapu (or other evolving Maori political structures) have a particular structural or partnership relationship as tangata whenua with the government, Maori are also a part of that government as people with the rights and privileges of New Zealand citizens.

An ultimate goal must continue to be that there is no inequality between Maori and other New Zealanders, and that statistical differences in terms of housing, employment, educational qualifications, income, health, child welfare and justice are wiped out. We still have some way to go, but there are a myriad of policy initiatives to address the remaining differences. On the other hand, we might remind ourselves from time to time that 10% Maori unemployment is also 90% Maori employment. Government initiatives may lead to perceptions of special treatment, but they are in fact simply targeted measures to achieve a “fair go” for everyone. They are not Treaty-based, but human rights based, although Article 3 of the Treaty did also give a guarantee of equal rights.

The issues that I want to focus on relate to the Treaty, language, culture and intercultural relationships and understanding. I want to see the debate about our history, the contemporary meaning of the Treaty and the protection of Maori language and culture take place in a positive and constructive context. It should be frank and honest, without people accusing each other of either being racist and “Maori-bashing” or politically correct. Let’s look at people’s views on their merits. Current calls for “treaty education” might be better described in terms of the need for wider public awareness of our history and our constitutional arrangements, acknowledging both the wrongs of the past and the many positives that have come from the Treaty relationship. It can include locating those stories in their places of origin, as we have done in Waitangi, but could do much better in the Kerikeri basin, Gisborne, Parihaka, Akaroa, Ruatahuna, Ruapekapeka, Rangiriri and many other places, as is currently advocated by the Historic Places Trust in its “heritage landscapes” initiative.

The Trust describes this concept as follows:

“Landscapes with cultural, ancestral and historic importance are a fundamental part of our identity. Maori see themselves as linked genealogically to the land of their ancestors. Communities feel strong connections with landscapes that reflect the past. Some landscapes are of iconic importance to the nation. Local, tribal and national identity are founded in the landscapes that link us to our history and culture. However, many of the precious heritage sites that are milestones of our history and emerging identity are unacknowledged or totally ignored. We celebrate our history in our archives, art galleries, cenotaphs, libraries, memorial halls and museums – but rarely in the places where it happened.”

When the Department of Conservation was given additional funding for “conservation awareness” in 2000 it used much of it to develop a hundred “conservation education supersites” throughout the country, so that people
could visit a site near their home or school, access educational resources and see what conservation means in their own community. This may have relevance to the concept of “Treaty awareness” based on sites of historic and cultural significance.

We also need to take further steps to ensure the proper place of the Maori language in New Zealand, not just in the whanau and on the marae, in our kohanga reo, kura kaupapa and wananga, but also in the public arena. We could start with making a renewed effort as individuals to pronounce correctly and learn a little more of the language. As I have suggested recently, a wider range of organisations could voluntarily play a greater role in using and promoting it, as central and local government and community agencies have started to do. Why can’t we have more Maori language on shop, office, professional and café signs in Queen Street and Lambton Quay, on the cover of the Telephone Book, and in our newspapers and magazines? Tourists to Canada often speak positively about the use of both English and French in such ways. Those who have tried it here are very positive about it. It doesn’t necessarily involve a significant cost, particularly with the opportunities to trial it on websites. My own quick survey tells me (although I would be happy to receive more examples) that one daily newspaper, Te Nupepa o te Tairawhiti, the Gisborne Herald, has a Maori name on its masthead, and one newspaper website (INL’s Stuff) has a Maori section called Korero. Television New Zealand has a Maori name, Te Reo Taetaki, as do Radio New Zealand and Canterbury Plains FM.

Although the mainstream political consensus on the Treaty of Waitangi has been under a little pressure recently, this year’s Waitangi Day was a sign of hope, arguments aside about the exclusion of the “mainstream media” from Te Tii marae. What I particularly applaud is the local marking of Waitangi Day in towns and cities throughout New Zealand, focusing on local stories, local signings of the Treaty, and local understanding and reconciliation, often organized by tangata whenua on their marae with support from central and local government. I encourage the trend to retrieve this day to focus on the relationship between Maori and other New Zealanders everywhere, not just at Waitangi, and to support Maori in showcasing and explaining their culture, their stories and their issues to their local communities. There is an equally welcome parallel trend to use March to celebrate and value the multicultural nature of New Zealand, culminating in Race Relations Day on 21 March, the United Nations Day for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Once again, this process is being led by ethnic communities, supported by local government.

**Immigration**

There has been a coincidence of a manageable increase in migration from Asia with a mushrooming industry of international student education, also predominantly from Asia. The effect in downtown Auckland and central Christchurch in particular has been to give an impression of a much larger permanent migration than is actually the case. The Christchurch Press runs a feature on “The Asian Invasion”, while the Southland Times heads its feature
“Immigrants, We Need You” (although I hasten to add that both were positive contributions to the debate).

We should be more relaxed about permanent immigration from Asia. People from the various countries of Asia are simply the latest wave of migrants in a long succession, all of whom, over time, have been accepted, contributed to the country and become good New Zealand citizens. If you heard their children on the radio, you wouldn’t know whether they were dark, tan or pale. They just sound like any other New Zealand kid. If at present they come from Asia, that is because Asia is the richest current source of qualified migrants who want to come here sufficiently to leave their family and country behind to start a new life in New Zealand. What is important is not where people come from, or what colour they are, but that they want to live here, have the skills, qualities and connections we need and that they contribute to our social fabric. If we have a vision of what we want New Zealand to be and what is needed to achieve that, then we will go out looking for the people that can best help us to do it, irrespective of colour, race, religion or national origin. It is this bigger picture, rather than the anecdotal detail, that the immigration debate should be about.

Having said that, it is vital to put in place the settlement policies and services that ensure that both the migrants themselves and the host community contribute to successful integration and that migrants feel welcomed, safe and at home. This cannot simply be left to individual migrants, who are only one part of the equation: it requires planning and significant on-going investment at a community-wide level. We have not done enough in this regard up till now.

The international student industry is a separate matter. We are talking here of temporary migration, as part of an international education market, in which we are well qualified to compete. The speed of growth of this industry has placed significant pressures on our educational institutions, some services (witness the recent case of one bank’s branches in Christchurch), anecdotally on our roads, and on the host community. The most worrying aspect is a deterioration in public conversation about Asians in general. An industry such as this needs co-ordination and planning for it to be sustainable in the longer term. That means strategy, standards, regard for the social and educational environment and care for the students involved. We must ensure it enhances and does not detract from our community – whether in the schools, the colleges, the universities, or on the streets. Although the additional income for educational students has been welcomed, there are grumblings from our teachers and lecturers, our students and our citizens that we cannot afford to ignore. The challenge to the export education industry is the same as the challenge to the tourism industry a decade ago and which has since been addressed – get organized and get on top of this issue or you will lose your customers and the support of New Zealanders and potentially do damage to both our race relations and our international reputation. The opportunity is there to achieve a really positive outcome for New Zealand.
Asia 2000 in its latest review quotes Bill Clinton as saying “The goodwill international students bear for our country will in the future constitute one of our greatest foreign policy assets”, and Massey researcher Andrew Butcher adds “They could also constitute one of our greatest foreign policy liabilities if we don’t get it right”. The same is true in terms of race relations. I look forward to Asia 2000’s forthcoming discussion paper on the issue, which I am sure will provide a useful basis for debate, as their paper on immigration did last year.

In a recent public opinion survey done for the Human Rights Commission, 79% of respondents identified Asians as the group most discriminated against in New Zealand. On the one hand, we can take this to mean that 79% of New Zealanders are concerned at what they perceive to be negative treatment of Asians, but on the other hand it is a signal that something needs to be addressed in our society.

Cultural Diversity
My third area of focus is the promotion of cultural diversity. As was widely acknowledged at the Knowledge Wave conference, cultural diversity is one of our great social and economic assets, which is currently grossly underutilized. We not only have a strong indigenous culture, but also many other cultures of the world. There has been a huge growth in celebrations of cultural diversity at the level of ethnic food, song, dance and craft. Just in the last month there have been major festivals attended by thousands in Auckland, Palmerston North, Christchurch, New Plymouth, Hastings, Porirua, Hutt City, to name just a few. People have queued up for the Human Rights Commission’s stickers promoting the Race Relations Day theme, and thousands of New Zealanders have worn them with pride. Over the course of “multicultural March”, which includes the Pasifika festival, WOMAD, the secondary schools Polynesian Festival and the national celebration of St Patrick’s day, as well as school activities around Race Relations Day, I reckon somewhere between half a million and a million of us will have been actively involved in celebrating cultural diversity in one way or another. Such events are a great way of introducing New Zealanders to our diversity and at the same time providing a very positive environment for ethnic minorities to raise their heads in public and feel valued. I don’t want to understate the importance of this, but there is another dimension. As a Dutch migrant, I don’t want my culture just to be neatly packaged into Dutch national dress, traditional dances, smoked sausages and cheese. I am also interested in what is currently happening in Holland, and what Dutch people are creating in New Zealand. I want to be part of both the contemporary Dutch diaspora and contemporary New Zealand culture, and to see a flourishing relationship between my country of origin and my country of adoption. Many of our countries of origin now actively nurture their diaspora, and embassies, organizations like the British Council, Asia 2000 and other cultural foundations have a key role to play along with Creative New Zealand, the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and local government. Maybe we will get to the point where we have an African, an American, and a European Foundation to support such efforts, as well as
the very successful Asia 2000 and the recently established Pacific Cooperation Foundation.

**The Role of the Human Rights Commission**

And finally, what happened to the Office of the Race Relations Conciliator? Most people still refer to me as the Conciliator rather than the Commissioner, even some who were instrumental in effecting the change. When the office was merged with the Human Rights Commission there was some concern that its effectiveness would be diminished, and that it would be absorbed and disappear under the wider umbrella of human rights. This is not the case. I have a statutory responsibility to lead the Commission on race relations issues, and the Commission has a Race and Ethnic Relations team of ten staff in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to support me. There are also two Kaiwhakarite focused on the Commission’s relationship with Māori, based in Auckland and Wellington.

The complaints process is now served by a group of specialist mediators in the Disputes Resolution Team. If a resolution is not achieved, complainants in most cases have recourse to the Office of Human Rights Proceedings and the Human Rights Tribunal. The new positions of Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner and Equal Employment Opportunities Manager have as part of their brief the critical issue of barriers to employment for minorities. Along with support services and the educational resources of the Human Rights Team, I believe that race relations is better resourced and better served than it ever was as a smaller separate organisation.

Two key projects arising from the amendment to the Human Rights Act are directly related to race relations – the “Treaty project”, which seeks to explore the human rights dimensions of the Treaty of Waitangi through a process of dialogue, and the development of a National Plan of Action for Human Rights.

The challenge now is to get that message out to the public, to make the Commission accessible and relevant to Māori, Pacific peoples, other ethnic communities and the general public so that they can better inform and benefit more from the work of the Commission.

The primary functions of the Commission are now:

(a) To advocate and promote respect for, and an understanding and appreciation of, human rights in New Zealand society; and

(b) To encourage the maintenance and development of harmonious relations between individuals and among the diverse groups of New Zealand society.

My own role within this new structure is an evolving one, although the elements are clearly set out in the amended Human Rights Act. A priority for me is to ensure that the mainstreaming of race relations within the new Human Rights Commission does not lead to a lessening of focus on this area. Having been divested of the role of conciliator for particular complaints, I am more able to focus on strategy, generic issues, relationships and advocacy. I see my role as being in the community, giving recognition to the efforts of the
many thousands of people and organizations who devote their time, professionally or voluntarily, to improving relationships, listening to their experiences and their concerns, sharing ideas and best practice, and articulating the issues identified by those involved to government, national organizations, the media and the public. Sometimes I am able to act as a catalyst by bringing people or organisations together to advance a particular concept or initiative, whether this be within central or local government, the export education industry, the culture and heritage sector, or in a particular community.

And finally…

Having set myself the target of meeting with every Mayor in New Zealand, and having made good initial progress towards this goal, I want to make special mention of the central importance of the role of local government in race relations. While it is vital for central government to develop policies and services that meet both Treaty obligations and the needs of a diverse society, it is at the local level that positive community relationships can best be fostered. Most councils are well on the road to addressing this challenge, with support for and involvement of both Maori and new and established migrant communities. They have recognized the contribution that both are able to make as added value to the economic, social and cultural environment of their cities and districts. They are beginning to invest much more significantly to realize this value.

I also want to engage with media managers and editors, to discuss the ways in which Maori, migrants and refugees are portrayed in the media. The media have a key role in providing more positive leadership in fostering and reflecting an inclusive, tolerant and diverse community. I challenge them to become champions of the Treaty and diversity as well as the champions of accountability, which they already are.

Tomorrow is Race Relations Day, and sadly the cloud of war in Iraq has cast a long shadow over our celebration. There isn’t much we can do internationally that hasn’t been done, but there is something we can do at home. After September 11, there were some ugly incidents in school playgrounds and elsewhere directed at Islamic New Zealanders. If things deteriorate further in relation to the Iraq war, there is a risk that Iraqi and Islamic New Zealanders may again be subject to abuse by a small minority. What we can all do over the next few weeks is make a special effort to make them feel welcome here. In the finest New Zealand tradition, we can give them a smile in the street, be attentive to them in school, bake them a cake, give them some flowers or veges, drop a card in their letterbox or invite them to a function or event. We can tell those who have family in Iraq that we are thinking of them as their homeland again becomes a theatre of war. What better way to mark Race Relations Day with a little bit of kiwi hospitality and understanding.