

New Zealand Harmony Accord Event

Chief Executive's speech

Tuesday, 22 July 2025 – Government House, Auckland

Tēnā koutou katoa,

As-salamu alaykum, Shalom, and warm greetings to everyone.

It is a genuine honour to be here with you all today for the signing of the Harmony Accord.

Can I acknowledge the Honourable Dame Cindy Kiro, Governor-General of New Zealand. Ngā mihi nui ki a koe, Your Excellency. Thank you so much for opening this whare to us and lending your mana to this occasion.

Minister Mark Mitchell, thank you for your leadership and your presence today. Members of Parliament and distinguished guests, thank you for choosing to be part of this important occasion. And to the many leaders of faith, culture, and community, your being here reminds us that this Accord is part of a wider journey we are all walking together.

That we're gathered here, in Government House, is significant. This setting matters. It represents the Crown, the dignity of our democracy, and the deep values of this country. It also signals clearly: this Accord is significant. It sits at the heart of who we are, and who we aspire to be.

Today, we are together weaving the type of unified society we want to be. The strength of the tapestry we weave has to be strong. It has to withstand pressures that are increasingly presenting themselves globally and right here, in our country.

We all know we live in extraordinary times: conflict, division and growing fears of the "other". There is less shame in proclaiming one's hate these days. Hate, once whispered, is now shouted out loud. But how we respond as a society says something about our DNA as a country.

As New Zealanders, we faced an incredible pressure in the form of the Christchurch Mosque Attacks just a few years ago. But from that tragedy arose a revelation of the true core of New Zealand society. People from diverse backgrounds, all across the country, stood in solidarity against hate in a profound and deeply moving way.

Our extraordinary response grabbed global attention. I have family abroad who were astounded at the way New Zealanders demonstrated un-orchestrated compassion for others in their communities.

The aftermath of the mosque attacks – it showed us all who we are as New Zealanders. It showed that we can show up for each other when there are forces that would pull us apart.

That same spirit is what brings us here today. The Harmony Accord that has been signed is a legacy. One of choosing to walk together, even when the path may be hard. Here we are—choosing solidarity, understanding, and dialogue.

But I want to be real – it did not arrive easily.

Behind today's Accord is the work of many hands, many minds, and many hearts. I've worked with so many of you over the past few months. I'll be honest. I saw strong differences in opinion and positions that are difficult to reconcile. But I saw people – just normal people – lawyers, teachers, businesspeople, community leaders, public servants – who were all doing their very best to stand up for what they truly believe is in the best interest of their communities.

Throughout the journey of getting to here- there has been anxiety and stress. There's no doubt about that. But what truly stands out is the willingness of the parties to show up and stand up for what is right.

At the centre of this event today is the courage and determination of the signatory organisations. Your leadership, your sacrifice, your willingness to stay at the table, and your commitment to finding common ground. It takes leadership to bring people together easy when times are good, harder when there're pressures dividing our people.

Ladies and gentlemen, what we're building here is bigger than ourselves as individuals, as communities and as government.

Social cohesion – it doesn't come from the sky or the government.

It truly comes from people like you, writing the future narrative of our country.

Let it not be lost on us that today will be marked in New Zealand's history. This simple accord – it is a shining symbol for our country.

It says that we will choose to engage and stand together with dignity even when it is tough. This is the light we carry. This is the candle in the dark for others to follow in the same path.

Today's Accord is a part of a wider journey.

Through the Ethnic Communities Development Fund, we're supporting community-led initiatives to build resilience and connection. We're also developing the Replace Hate campaign, grounded in a simple message: New Zealand is home to all of us.

Everyone in the Ministry - we've been privileged to walk alongside you, to carefully listen and to support the steps needed to get here. We have learnt a lot about people, communities and diversity. We've been deeply touched by the courage and true commitment to unity we've seen in our communities.

In closing, I want to thank you for everything the signatories have done to bringing this harmony accord to be. I thank you as the Chief Executive of the Ministry but much more so as a New Zealander who deeply cherishes this amazing land, Aotearoa New Zealand that I migrated to almost 40 years ago. You have breathed life into my belief that we can be united in the face of the most formidable challenges.

Somewhere out there is a child who will take inspiration from what has happened here today and carry with her the seeds of unity into the next chapter of our country.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.
Thank you.