

Children's Commissioner says UN report must be taken seriously

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For immediate release

Children's Commissioner Judge Andrew Becroft says he welcomes the latest UN report outlining how well New Zealand is upholding children's rights and well-being.

"I'm reassured that an expert international Committee has so accurately identified what is needed to improve the lives of our children. They have made a number of very appropriate and considered recommendations," Commissioner Judge Becroft said.

"The report deserves to be taken seriously and the recommendations acted on without delay. There is no good reason not to. If we take our international obligations seriously, and also honour our promises made to New Zealand children, then we have no choice but to face up to the clear recommendations that have been issued by the UN experts.

"The Committee has pointed out the many positive initiatives the current Government has introduced – including the reform of the care and protection system, with its focus on the child at the centre. I'm in full support of the vision of this work and think the potential for Oranga Tamariki to be a world-leading organisation is within our grasp.

"However, there are other areas where we are seeing far less progress. In some instances that has been the case for Governments across the decades.

"This applies especially to our on-going failure to include 17-year-olds in the youth justice system. This is an enduring stain on our otherwise very good youth justice record over the last 27 years. The UN was right to once again question New Zealand's position on this.

"There are significant advantages in including 17-year-olds, and when the change is properly understood, no real disadvantages. I am hopeful Ministers will make the right choice when this decision comes before Cabinet soon.

"Another recurring theme in the UN's report was the disproportionately poor outcomes for Maori children. New Zealand's dismal record in this area is unmistakable and simply cannot be ignored. We cannot accept such blatant inequalities for Maori children.

"The UN was right to recommend a systematic plan for addressing poverty, especially for Maori and Pasifika children, who are again over-represented. The introduction of a plan, preferably agreed to across political parties, would mean that everyone – government, business, charities, individuals – could see where our role was to improve children's lives.

"I hope the UN's report will become a useful tool and benchmark for government, and all those working towards better outcomes for our nation's children, before the next report in five years."

Ends.