

SNOWCHANGE 2008

Owae Marae, Waitara, Taranaki
Aotearoa (New Zealand)



It's been four years since Snowchange met in Alaska - four long years of planning and preparation. You can read the account of Snowchange 2008 on their website, www.snowchange.org. The front page of The LOOM tells of ritual held for Mahinekura, whose dream it was to have Snowchange come to Aotearoa. Tapestry was unable to attend this year, but applauds the courage, vision, and hard work of Snowchange. Please open your hearts to the profound welcome message they have given us permission to reprint for you here. The words are not the whole of it.

Snowchange 08 Welcome Message, December 4, 2008

Hon. Tariana Turia
Co-leader of the Maori party

As we have travelled from across the country and across the world to Taranaki, I have been thinking about the beautiful and delicate mountain, Pihanga, who brought us together - from Te Kahui Maunga - the mountains of Ruapehu, Tongariro, Ngaruahoe, Tauhara - to Matua Te Tapu, Maunga Taranaki.

All of the mountains wanted Pihanga for their own but particularly Tongariro and Taranaki.

All of the elements of the earth came together in pursuit of love - ash and lava erupted, the thunder struck, the lightning flashed, as Tongariro and Taranaki fought.

Defeated in love, Taranaki returned home, guided all the journey home by Rauhotu o Tapairu - Te Toka a Rauhotu.

A rock of great mana led him home, guiding his return to the coast, to where he settled by the beautiful ranges of Pouakai - from which would come the off-spring of wind and rain, of rocks and rivers, of land.

This story - of love and passion and energy - is one which no doubt resonates with other stories from our indigenous brothers and sisters across the world.

It is a story which will vary according to the tribal origins of the storyteller - but a story, nevertheless that we share.

It is a story in which we, as guardians of the earth, respect and reflect the awe with which we consider the climate, Mother Earth, and the relationship between all of the elements.

It is a story of falling in love.

Today Te Huirangi Waikarepuru invites us to fall in love again.

This time, to fall in love with our natural knowledge, our tribal traditions, our customary rituals.

From where I come, we have a saying, ko au te awa, ko te awa, ko au; I am the river and the river is me.

In essence, it means we are intimately connected with our environment, our natural world around us.

It is this intimate connection between Ranginui, our sky father, and Papatuanuku, our earth Mother, that brings us together from nga hau e wha - the four corners of the world.

And so we celebrate those who grace Aotearoa with their distinguished presence including:

- * The Saami people of Finland;
- * The Inuits of Nunavut;
- * the people of Gwitchin;
- * the indigenous people of Siberia;
- * the people of Alaska; and
- * the Northern Forum Academy of Russia.

We embrace your knowledge, your skills and expertise as indigenous leaders, and we welcome the opportunity to work together in the pursuit of long-term solutions.

We recall too, that many of the practices of desecration and despoliation of the land, are practices brought to us during a period when our lands were occupied by others.

Our people had a whakatauki to warn us of the impact

Ko te haeremai he ngarara; Ko ona niho, he kōura
Ko tona kai he whenua

There a great beast coming, who has teeth of gold, a hunger for land.
The impacts of that time remain with us.

And now we clear the land, we build up our dairying stock, we dirty the rivers with agricultural pollution, and we do it all in the name of progress, a pathway to capitalism.

The impact of colonisation was not only about the loss of land.

It also brought with it a desecration of our belief systems to the extent that we no longer follow the guidelines our ancestors left for us, to invest in the health and wellbeing of the planet.

That is why it is time for change.

Snowchange.

Snowchange 2008 is intended to provide a base for us to share strategies, to seek solutions to the ecological and environmental catastrophe caused by global warming.

That's a pretty big mission.

But today, on International Polar Day, I believe we can take on the world.

And indeed the focus for this year stretches our world out above the polar region to far off galaxies in which we observe the atmospheric sciences, astronomy and polar observations from space.

It is a chance to remind us that the atmosphere over ice and snow laden areas, is unique, and provides a vital cooling process for our global climate system.

It is all a matter of balance.

The balance between kawa, te kauwae runga; and tikanga, te kauwae raro.

Our people of Whanganui, believe our mauriora, our total wellbeing resides in keeping the balance between te kauwae-runga - celestial knowledge; an te kauwae-raro - terrestrial knowledge.

It's a simple equation, a triangle if you like.

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