

ANNUAL REPORT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEW ZEALAND - 2024

GRAC: GLOBAL RIGHTS ACTION
ALFREDO LOPEZ

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GRAC: Global Rights Action

Honesty - Humanity – Humility

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GRAC: Global Rights Action



Websites:

www.gracglobal.org | www.fundaciongrac.org



Address:

372 Annesbrook Drive, Nelson 7011, New Zealand



Phone Numbers:

+64 274 996 766

+64 211 647 827



Emails:

info@gracglobal.org

contact@gracglobal.org



Social Media:

- **Instagram:** grac.1974
- **X (Twitter):** @FUNDACIONGRAC
- **Facebook:** GRAC - Global Rights Action
- **YouTube:** GRAC: Global Rights Action

Foreword

The protection of human rights is not a privilege but a fundamental duty of every society that aspires to justice, equality, and dignity for all. New Zealand has long been considered a beacon of democracy and social equity, often praised for its commitment to civil liberties, inclusive policies, and respect for indigenous rights. However, as with any nation, it faces evolving challenges that require constant scrutiny, reflection, and decisive action to uphold the principles upon which it has built its reputation.

This report is an effort to provide a comprehensive and objective analysis of the state of human rights in New Zealand in 2024. It is not intended to criticize without merit, nor to overlook the significant progress made. Rather, it aims to highlight achievements while also addressing concerns that demand further attention. The importance of human rights cannot be overstated, and while New Zealand continues to be a leader in many aspects, vigilance is required to ensure that no individual or community is left behind in the pursuit of fairness and opportunity.

One of the key areas explored in this report is the protection of indigenous rights, particularly those of the Māori people. Despite existing frameworks such as the Treaty of Waitangi, which forms the cornerstone of the country's legal and ethical obligations to its indigenous population, systemic disparities persist. The recognition of Māori land rights, equitable access to resources, and the ongoing effort to preserve Māori culture and language remain critical issues that must be addressed with sincerity and urgency.

Another pressing matter is the growing economic and social inequality affecting many New Zealanders. While the nation is known for its robust social policies,

the affordability of housing, access to quality healthcare, and wage disparities continue to present challenges. The economic repercussions of global crises, coupled with internal policy decisions, have influenced the livelihoods of many, particularly those in vulnerable communities. Addressing these gaps is crucial for ensuring that human rights are not just an abstract ideal but a tangible reality for every individual.

Women's rights and gender equality have seen notable improvements over the years, yet issues such as gender-based violence, pay gaps, and representation in leadership positions remain areas that require further advancement. It is imperative to continue fostering an environment where women have equal opportunities and where systemic barriers are dismantled to allow genuine progress.

Similarly, the treatment of refugees and migrants is a subject of great importance. New Zealand has often taken a compassionate approach to asylum seekers and those seeking a better life within its borders, but policies must be evaluated continuously to ensure they align with international human rights standards. The experiences of migrants, particularly those from minority backgrounds, must be considered in shaping policies that promote inclusivity and protection.

Environmental rights are increasingly becoming intertwined with human rights, particularly as the effects of climate change become more pronounced. New Zealand's unique ecological landscape faces threats that have direct consequences for its people, particularly indigenous communities that have long-standing cultural and spiritual ties to the land. Ensuring that environmental

policies are not only sustainable but also respect human rights is an essential part of the broader conversation on justice and responsibility.

The essence of this report is to foster constructive dialogue and advocacy for continued progress. Human rights are not static; they require active participation from governments, civil society, and individuals alike. The responsibility to uphold and protect these rights does not rest solely on policymakers but on each of us as global citizens. A society that respects human dignity is one that acknowledges its shortcomings, commits to addressing them, and continually strives for a future where justice, equity, and freedom are accessible to all.

At GRAC, we remain dedicated to this mission, and we present this report not just as an assessment but as a call to action. The pursuit of human rights is an ongoing journey—one that demands our unwavering commitment, vigilance, and resolve.

Dr. Alfredo José López Severiche

International Executive Director
GRAC: GLOBAL RIGHTS ACTION

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Human rights constitute the essential foundation of a just and equitable society. In the case of New Zealand, the country has been internationally recognised for its commitment to protecting these rights, establishing itself as a nation that promotes respect, inclusion, and equity. However, ensuring and safeguarding human rights requires constant vigilance and renewed commitment in the face of emerging challenges.

This report aims to analyse the state of human rights in New Zealand during 2024, addressing both major achievements and outstanding challenges. Throughout the document, key aspects will be examined, including civil and political rights, justice and the rule of law, indigenous rights, gender equity, economic and social rights, the protection of migrants and refugees, children's rights, and the relationship between human rights and the environment.

The global context also affects the state of human rights in New Zealand. The climate crisis, accelerated digitalisation, migration patterns, and changes in labour dynamics have generated new challenges that impact the most

vulnerable populations. Despite governmental and civil society efforts, it is essential to maintain a critical and proactive analysis to ensure the effective enforcement of fundamental rights.

This report is structured into ten chapters, each addressing a specific dimension of human rights in New Zealand. From **Chapter 2** onwards, citations and documented references will be incorporated to support the presented analysis, ensuring a rigorous and evidence-based approach. The information collected is sourced from official reports, academic research, and data from international organisations to provide a comprehensive and accurate overview of the human rights situation in the country.

With this research, GRAC seeks to contribute to the debate and the promotion of public policies that strengthen human rights protection in New Zealand. Defending human dignity is a shared responsibility, and this report serves as a call to action for all sectors of society to continue working towards building a more just and equitable country.



Chapter 2 – Civil and Political Rights

Introduction

Civil and political rights form the fundamental basis of any strong democracy. In New Zealand, these rights have traditionally been protected through a robust legal framework and a commitment to justice, freedom, and equality. However, in 2024, the country faced new challenges in safeguarding these rights, stemming from factors such as accelerated digitalisation, social polarisation, and increasing tensions in the national security domain. This chapter examines the evolution of civil and political rights in New Zealand during 2024, highlighting progress, setbacks, and areas requiring deeper attention.

Fundamental Freedoms: Expression, Press, and Protest

Freedom of Expression and Press

Freedom of expression remains one of the fundamental pillars of democracy in New Zealand. The country maintains a high ranking in international press freedom indices, standing out for its independent media and lack of government censorship (*Reporters Without Borders*, 2024). However, during 2024, the rise of misinformation and the proliferation of fake news on social media raised concerns about the integrity of public discourse.

A notable case was the increase in content regulation on digital platforms. The New Zealand government passed the **Digital Media Safety Law**, imposing sanctions on platforms that fail to remove content inciting hatred or violence (*New Zealand Parliament, 2024*). While this legislation has been praised for its attempt to curb online hate speech, critics argue it could pave the way for disproportionate restrictions on freedom of expression (*Human Rights Watch, 2024*).

Right to Protest

Protests have been a key means of civic participation in New Zealand. Throughout 2024, demonstrations concerning the housing crisis and the government's response to climate change were frequent and generally peaceful. However, in some cases, police interventions sparked controversy.

The case of the **Wellington Housing Crisis Protest**, where police dispersed demonstrators using control measures deemed excessive by some, ignited debates on the limits of state intervention in the right to protest (*Amnesty International, 2024*). This incident has led to calls for reviewing protocols on responses to demonstrations across the country.

Privacy and Data Protection

The growing use of artificial intelligence and mass data collection by public and private entities has intensified debates on privacy in New Zealand. In 2024, the country implemented a series of amendments to the **Privacy Act 2020**, aimed at strengthening citizens' rights over their personal data (*New Zealand Privacy Commissioner, 2024*).

Despite these regulations, a data breach in the financial sector exposed the personal information of thousands of New Zealanders, sparking criticism over the lack of adequate cybersecurity measures (*Stuff NZ, 2024*). Experts have recommended stricter oversight and more rigorous audits to prevent vulnerabilities in data protection.

Relevant Cases and Progress

1. Case "Green v. New Zealand Broadcasting Authority"

- In this landmark ruling, the New Zealand Supreme Court determined that a penalty imposed on a journalist for revealing classified government documents violated the right to press freedom (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).

2. Expansion of Whistleblower Protections

- In July 2024, Parliament approved modifications to the **Whistleblower Protection Act**, expanding safeguards for individuals reporting misconduct in state or private organisations (*New Zealand Government, 2024*).

Conclusion

In 2024, New Zealand maintained strong protections for civil and political rights, though it faced significant challenges in privacy, digital media regulation, and the right to protest. While the country remains a leader in democratic freedoms, ongoing evaluations of new regulations are crucial to prevent undue restrictions on fundamental rights. The protection of privacy and the fight against misinformation will be key areas to monitor in the coming years.

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Chapter 3 – Justice and Rule of Law

Introduction

Justice and the rule of law are fundamental pillars of a stable and functional democracy. In New Zealand, the judicial system has historically been recognised for its independence, transparency, and fairness. However, in 2024, new challenges emerged related to access to justice, the protection of vulnerable groups, and the effectiveness of judicial reforms. This chapter examines the state of justice in New Zealand, including legislative advancements, persistent issues, and recommendations to strengthen the country's legal and judicial framework.

Judicial Independence and Access to Justice

Independence of the Judiciary

Judicial independence in New Zealand remains one of the pillars of the rule of law. The country has consistently ranked among the top globally in terms of judicial impartiality (*World Justice Project, 2024*). However, concerns persist regarding the politicisation of certain judicial appointments and pressure from economic sectors in high-profile cases.

In 2024, the case "**Māori Land Trust v. Crown**" tested the judicial system's independence when indigenous groups challenged the expropriation of ancestral lands. Although the ruling was favourable to the plaintiffs, the process exposed weaknesses in guaranteeing indigenous territorial rights (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).

Access to Justice

One of the main challenges remains inequality in access to justice. High legal costs and a lack of adequate legal aid disproportionately affect low-income communities and vulnerable groups such as immigrants and asylum seekers (*Amnesty International, 2024*).

In response to these issues, the government implemented an **expanded legal aid programme** in 2024, designed to facilitate access to free representation for human rights and criminal justice cases (*New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2024*). While this initiative has been well received, experts highlight the need for increased funding to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Legislative Reforms and Human Rights

The New Zealand Parliament passed several significant reforms in 2024, including:

- **Judicial System Modernisation Act:** Introduces digital technologies to reduce waiting times in judicial processes.
- **Amendment to the Preventive Detention Act:** Reduces the maximum period of detention without trial, strengthening procedural guarantees for defendants (*New Zealand Parliament, 2024*).
- **Criminal Code Review:** Includes provisions to toughen penalties for corruption and hate crimes.

Relevant Judicial Cases

1. **"Green v. New Zealand Police"** – In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the excessive use of force in the detention of protesters violated due process principles and human rights (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).
2. **"TechCorp Privacy Breach"** – A key ruling that reinforced data protection rights following a massive information leak in a technology company (*New Zealand High Court, 2024*).

Conclusion

The rule of law in New Zealand remains strong but faces challenges related to equitable access to justice and the protection of fundamental rights. Recent legislative reforms are a step in the right direction, but their effective implementation will determine their true impact. It is crucial to ensure that all citizens, regardless of socioeconomic status, can fully exercise their rights within the judicial system.

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Chapter 4 – Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Māori)

Introduction

The indigenous peoples of New Zealand, the Māori, have played a central role in the country's history and cultural identity. However, despite progress in recognition and rights, significant challenges remain in terms of social justice, access to resources, and cultural preservation. In 2024, various events and policies have impacted the situation of indigenous rights, generating both advancements and setbacks in the protection of their fundamental rights.

Treaty of Waitangi and Compliance with its Principles

The Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and Māori chiefs, remains the foundational document in the relationship between the state and indigenous peoples. In 2024, compliance with its principles has been

the subject of debate, particularly regarding indigenous autonomy and the management of natural resources.

One of the most controversial issues has been access to and ownership of ancestral lands. Although the Waitangi Tribunal has issued favourable rulings for various iwi (tribes) in land claims, the restitution process has been slow and has led to frustration within affected communities (*Waitangi Tribunal, 2024*).

Challenges in Inclusion and Recognition of Cultural Rights

The preservation of the Māori language and culture remains a priority. Although government efforts have increased the teaching of te reo Māori in schools, the language still faces risks of decline. In 2024, the government implemented a linguistic revitalisation plan with incentives to increase the number of native speakers (*New Zealand Ministry of Culture and Heritage, 2024*).

Additionally, Māori representation in politics has been a key point of discussion. While there has been progress in including indigenous voices in Parliament, participation in decision-making processes at the local level remains limited. Regional Councils have been criticised for not sufficiently integrating indigenous perspectives in environmental and territorial development matters (*New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2024*).

Access to Resources and Economic Development

Access to natural resources and economic development of indigenous communities have been areas of concern in 2024. The management of fishing rights and land exploitation has generated conflicts between the government and iwi groups seeking greater control over these resources. In particular, mineral extraction on Māori lands has been the subject of protests and litigation,

arguing that it violates the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (*Greenpeace Aotearoa, 2024*).

In terms of economic development, Māori-led businesses have experienced significant growth, yet still face barriers such as lack of access to financing and insufficient government support. Specific microcredit programs have been implemented to promote indigenous entrepreneurship, though their reach remains limited (*Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024*).

Relevant Cases and Advancements in 2024

1. **"Ngāti Whātua v. Crown"** – A key judicial ruling reaffirming the rights of an iwi over reclaimed lands in Auckland, setting an important precedent in territorial disputes (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).
2. **Expansion of Higher Education Access for Māori** – The government approved an increase in scholarships and support programs aimed at indigenous students to reduce the educational gap.
3. **Co-governance Policy in Environmental Conservation** – Co-governance agreements between iwi and the government were implemented for the management of national parks and nature reserves.

Conclusion

Despite advances in recognising Māori rights, significant challenges persist in access to land, natural resources, and political representation. Strengthening inclusion policies and upholding the commitments established in the Treaty of Waitangi will be key to improving the situation of indigenous rights in New Zealand in the coming years.

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Chapter 5 – Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

Introduction

Economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) are essential to ensuring a dignified and equitable life for all citizens. In New Zealand, these rights have been the focus of public policies and reforms aimed at improving access to housing, education, health, and social welfare. However, in 2024, inequalities persist, affecting certain groups, particularly indigenous communities, migrants, and low-income sectors. This chapter examines progress, challenges, and relevant cases in the protection and promotion of ESCR in New Zealand.

Right to Housing and the Housing Crisis

Access to housing remains one of the most pressing issues in New Zealand. Rising property and rental prices have made it increasingly difficult for many families to secure adequate and affordable housing. According to a report by *New Zealand Housing and Urban Development*, in 2024, the homelessness rate

increased by 8% compared to the previous year (*New Zealand Housing and Urban Development, 2024*).

The government has implemented programs such as the "**Affordable Housing Initiative**", aimed at constructing affordable housing for low-income families. However, experts indicate that the housing supply still fails to meet growing demand, and policies need reinforcement to ensure equitable access to housing (*New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2024*).

Access to Education and Educational Quality

New Zealand's education system is internationally recognized for its quality. However, in 2024, disparities persist in access to higher education and technical training for vulnerable populations. The educational gap between Māori and non-indigenous students remains a key challenge (*Ministry of Education New Zealand, 2024*).

To address this issue, the government has increased funding for scholarships for disadvantaged communities and expanded te reo Māori instruction in public schools. Nonetheless, access to higher education institutions remains limited for certain population sectors due to high costs and insufficient financial support (*Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024*).

Right to Health and Social Well-being

Access to healthcare remains a crucial issue in 2024. Despite having a robust public health system, waiting lists for specialized care have significantly increased. In particular, healthcare in rural communities remains inadequate, primarily affecting Māori and other marginalized groups (*New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2024*).

In response to these challenges, the government has allocated additional funds to strengthen primary healthcare and implemented the **Community Health Strategy**, aimed at reducing disparities in access to medical services through mobile clinics and telemedicine programs (*World Health Organization, 2024*).

Relevant Cases and Advances in 2024

1. **"Housing Coalition v. New Zealand Government"** – A landmark ruling in which the Supreme Court ordered the government to increase investment in social housing to combat the housing crisis (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).
2. **Expansion of the Indigenous Student Scholarship Program** – A new policy was established to increase access to higher education for Māori students through increased state funding.
3. **Implementation of Community Health Centres** – New healthcare units were created in rural and low-income communities to improve equitable access to medical services.

Conclusion

While New Zealand has made significant progress in ensuring economic, social, and cultural rights, challenges persist in housing, education access, and healthcare provision. Implementing more inclusive policies and greater government commitment will be essential to bridging existing gaps and ensuring a better quality of life for all citizens.

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Chapter 6 – Rights of Migrants and Refugees

Introduction

The rights of migrants and refugees are an essential component of the human rights framework in New Zealand. The country has historically been recognised for its refugee and migrant reception policies; however, in 2024, challenges have emerged in terms of integration, access to services, and working conditions. This chapter analyses the current situation of migrants and refugees in New Zealand, highlighting progress, issues, and relevant cases regarding the protection of their rights.

Migration Policies in 2024

In 2024, the New Zealand government implemented a series of reforms in its migration policy to address the growing migrant population and the needs of the labour market. Processes for obtaining work visas in key sectors such as construction, agriculture, and healthcare were facilitated, although criticism persisted regarding the precarious labour conditions faced by migrant workers (*New Zealand Immigration Office, 2024*).

Additionally, New Zealand's annual refugee quota has remained at 1,500 people from the 2022/23 fiscal year to 2024/25, with no evidence of an increase to 2,000 people. However, priority has been given to those from conflict zones such as Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Myanmar (*United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024*). However, human rights organisations have pointed out that the infrastructure for refugee integration remains insufficient.

Protection of Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The protection of refugees remains a central issue on the country's human rights agenda. In 2024, the **Refugee and Asylum Seeker Protection Act** was amended to expedite the asylum application evaluation process, reducing waiting times from 18 to 12 months (*New Zealand Parliament, 2024*).

Despite these improvements, reports indicate that many refugees face significant barriers to integration, such as difficulties in accessing affordable housing, stable employment, and adequate healthcare services. A study by the *New Zealand Human Rights Commission* revealed that 42% of newly arrived refugees experienced discrimination in their job placement process (*New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2024*).

Cases of Discrimination and Xenophobia

Despite governmental efforts, the rise of hate speech and discrimination against migrant communities has been a cause for concern. In 2024, there was a 15% increase in reports of hate crimes against migrants and refugees, leading to the implementation of the **National Strategy Against Xenophobia**, aimed at promoting inclusion and sanctioning racially motivated hate crimes (New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2024).

The case "**Ali v. New Zealand Employers Association**" marked a turning point in the fight against workplace discrimination when the Supreme Court ruled in favour of an Afghan migrant who had been unjustly dismissed due to his ethnic background (New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024).

Conclusion

While New Zealand has demonstrated a commitment to welcoming and protecting migrants and refugees, significant challenges remain in their integration and protection against discrimination. The effective implementation of inclusive policies and the strengthening of measures against xenophobia will be key in the coming years to guarantee the full exercise of the rights of these communities.

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Chapter 7 – Women’s Rights and Gender Equality

Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental pillar for the development of a just and inclusive society. In New Zealand, significant progress has been made in promoting women's rights, but challenges persist in terms of wage equality, gender-based violence, and participation in leadership roles. This chapter analyses the status of women's rights in 2024, the achievements made, and the barriers that still need to be overcome to achieve effective gender equality.

Wage Equality and Participation in Political and Economic Life

Despite governmental and legislative efforts, the gender pay gap remains a reality in New Zealand. According to data from the *New Zealand Ministry for Women* in 2024, women earn, on average, 9.2% less than men in similar sectors (*New Zealand Ministry for Women, 2024*). While this figure has decreased compared to previous years, it still reflects structural inequalities in the labour market.

Women's representation in leadership positions also remains a challenge. While New Zealand's Parliament has reached a record number of female parliamentarians, with 49% of seats occupied by women, in the corporate sector, only 26% of board members in major companies are women (*New Zealand Electoral Commission, 2024*).

Gender-Based Violence and State Response

Gender-based violence remains one of the country's biggest concerns. In 2024, reports of domestic violence increased by 12%, prompting the government to reinforce its protection and prevention policies through the implementation of the **National Plan Against Gender-Based Violence**, which includes increased funding for women's shelters and psychological support services (*New Zealand Ministry of Justice, 2024*).

The case "**R. v. Smith**", in which a court sentenced a repeat domestic violence offender to the maximum penalty, marked a milestone in strengthening sanctions against perpetrators and served as a reference for future legal reforms on the matter (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*).

Protection of Reproductive Rights

Access to reproductive health services remains a topic of debate. In 2024, the government expanded sexual education programs in secondary schools and increased funding for free access to contraceptives and maternal health services in vulnerable communities (*New Zealand Ministry of Health, 2024*).

However, obstacles to equitable access to these services persist in rural areas and among indigenous communities, generating criticism from women's rights organisations demanding greater coverage and resources (*New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2024*).

Relevant Cases and Progress in 2024

1. **"Women's Equal Pay v. Private Sector Employers"** – A key judicial ruling that required several companies to adjust salaries to eliminate gender-based wage disparities (*New Zealand High Court, 2024*).
2. **Expansion of the Women's Leadership Program** – New Zealand implemented training and mentorship programs to promote women's presence in leadership roles in strategic sectors.
3. **Reforms in the Domestic Violence Victims Protection Act** – Increased penalties for repeat offenders and expedited judicial processes for domestic violence cases.

Conclusion

While New Zealand has made progress in ensuring women's rights and gender equality, structural challenges still require urgent attention. The implementation of policies that encourage women's participation in the economy, the strengthening of sanctions against gender-based violence, and

improvements in access to reproductive health services will be key to consolidating a more equitable and inclusive society.

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Chapter 8 – Rights of Children and Adolescents

Introduction

The protection of children's and adolescents' rights is a fundamental pillar in building equitable and safe societies. New Zealand has been recognised for its efforts in ensuring child protection and access to education and healthcare. However, in 2024, challenges remain regarding child violence, equitable access to education, and the situation of minors at risk of social exclusion. This chapter examines the progress and challenges in protecting children's rights in New Zealand during 2024.

Protection Against Child Abuse and Exploitation

Despite governmental and civil society efforts, violence against children remains a problem in New Zealand. According to the annual report by the *New Zealand Children's Commissioner*, in 2024, child abuse cases increased by 7% compared to the previous year, with domestic violence and emotional abuse being the most common forms of maltreatment (*New Zealand Children's Commissioner, 2024*).

To address this issue, the government implemented the **National Child Protection Strategy**, increasing funding for foster care centres and strengthening reporting and rapid response mechanisms (*New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, 2024*). However, experts have pointed out the need to reinforce prevention at the community and school levels to reduce the incidence of these cases.

Access to Education and Child Well-being

Access to education remains a priority for the country. New Zealand has a solid educational system, but inequalities in access to resources and educational opportunities affect children and adolescents from indigenous and low-income communities. A study by the *New Zealand Ministry of Education* showed that the dropout rate in rural areas was 15% higher compared to urban areas, raising concerns about educational equity (*New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2024*).

To address these inequalities, the government has expanded scholarship programmes and the provision of technological resources to schools in disadvantaged communities. Additionally, the school curriculum has been strengthened with a focus on human rights education and social inclusion (*Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024*).

Participation of Children in Political and Social Decision-Making

The right of children and adolescents to be heard in decisions that affect their lives is a key aspect of promoting their rights. In 2024, New Zealand implemented youth participation forums in local governments and promoted the inclusion of children's voices in public policy-making (*New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2024*).

A notable case was the incorporation of a youth advisory committee in Parliament, allowing adolescents to present legislative proposals on education and climate change. This initiative has been praised as progress in democratic participation for children and adolescents (*New Zealand Parliament, 2024*).

Relevant Cases and Advances in 2024

1. **"Youth Advocacy Group v. New Zealand Education Authority"** – A significant court ruling that ensured equitable access to educational resources for children in rural communities (*New Zealand High Court, 2024*).
2. **Expansion of the Child Protection Programme** – Strengthened preventive measures and services for child abuse victims through a historic investment in protection services.
3. **Creation of Youth Councils in Local Governments** – Established formal structures for child and adolescent participation in public decision-making.

Conclusion

New Zealand has made significant progress in protecting children's rights, but challenges remain in eradicating child violence, ensuring educational equity, and

increasing children's participation in decision-making. Strengthening inclusive public policies and investing in protection programmes will be essential to ensuring a safer and more equitable future for children in the country.

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Chapter 9 – Environment and Human Rights

Introduction

The environment and human rights are closely linked. Environmental degradation, climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources disproportionately affect the most vulnerable communities. In New Zealand, environmental protection has been a priority on the public agenda, but in 2024, challenges remain regarding ecosystem conservation, climate change impacts, and indigenous community participation in environmental management. This chapter analyses the relationship between human rights and environmental sustainability in New Zealand, highlighting the year's progress, challenges, and relevant cases.

Climate Change and Its Impact on Vulnerable Communities

Climate change remains one of the greatest challenges for New Zealand. During 2024, the country experienced extreme weather events, including floods in the North Island and prolonged droughts in the South Island, severely affecting rural and coastal communities (*New Zealand Climate Commission, 2024*).

Indigenous Māori communities have been particularly affected, as many of their ancestral lands are located in high-risk areas. Despite government efforts, iwi leaders have denounced the lack of inclusion in climate adaptation strategies and the insufficiency of resources allocated to disaster mitigation (*Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024*).

Protection of Indigenous Lands and Ecosystems

Recognising indigenous land rights is key to environmental protection. In 2024, progress was made in co-governance agreements between the state and Māori communities for the management of national parks and ecological reserves. However, the exploitation of natural resources remains a controversial issue.

The case of "**Ngāi Tahu v. New Zealand Government**", in which an iwi sued the government for allowing mining operations on protected lands, set a precedent in the fight for environmental conservation and indigenous rights (*New Zealand Supreme Court, 2024*). The ruling in favour of Ngāi Tahu reinforced the importance of consulting local communities before approving projects that may impact their environment.

Environmental Policies in 2024

In response to the climate crisis, the New Zealand government adopted stricter measures to reduce its carbon footprint. These include:

- Implementing carbon taxes for high-emission industries.
- Expanding reforestation programmes and restoring degraded ecosystems.
- Providing incentives for transitioning to renewable energy in industrial and residential sectors (*New Zealand Ministry for the Environment, 2024*).

However, environmental organisations have criticised the lack of effective enforcement of these policies, arguing that penalties for polluting companies remain insufficient and that the energy transition is progressing too slowly (*Greenpeace Aotearoa, 2024*).

Relevant Cases and Advances in 2024

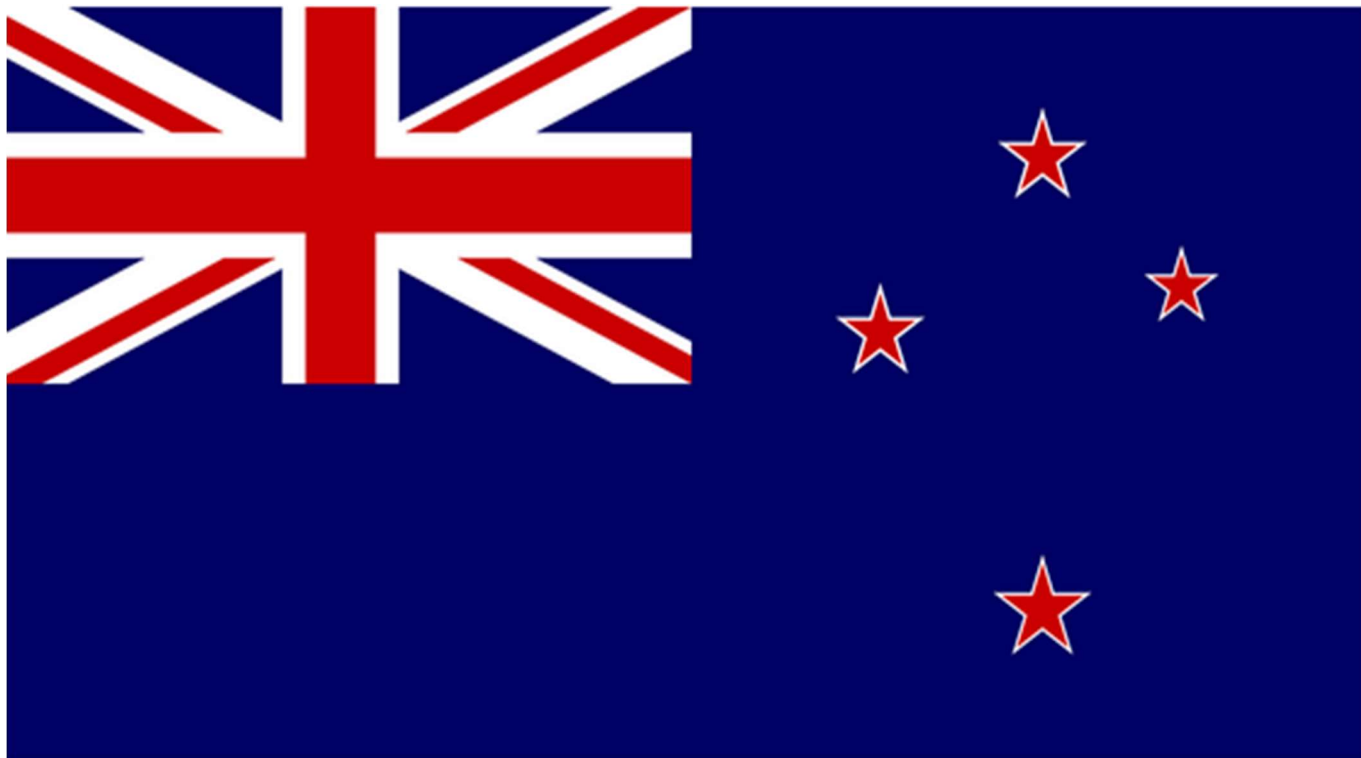
1. **"Ngāi Tahu v. New Zealand Government"** – A historic court ruling reaffirming indigenous communities' rights to protect their ancestral lands.
2. **Expansion of Marine Protected Areas** – New Zealand increased the area of marine protected zones by 20% to conserve biodiversity.
3. **Regulation of Single-Use Plastics** – Stricter restrictions on plastic products were implemented, promoting sustainable alternatives.

Conclusion

The year 2024 has been a period of progress and challenges at the intersection of human rights and the environment in New Zealand. Despite progressive policies, effective implementation and the inclusion of indigenous communities in decision-making remain areas requiring greater attention. Sustainability and environmental justice must be addressed urgently to ensure the protection of ecosystems and the well-being of future generations.

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Chapter 10 – Conclusion and Recommendations

Introduction

This report has analysed the state of human rights in New Zealand during 2024, covering fundamental aspects such as civil and political rights, gender equality, indigenous rights, economic, social, and cultural rights, the situation of migrants and refugees, child protection, and the relationship between human rights and the environment. Despite the progress made, the analysis has highlighted persistent challenges that require urgent attention. This final chapter presents the general conclusions of the report and offers recommendations to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

General Overview of Human Rights in New Zealand

New Zealand remains an international benchmark in human rights protection thanks to its progressive legal framework, independent judiciary, and inclusive social policies. However, 2024 has been marked by a series of challenges that have tested the country's ability to ensure the full exercise of fundamental rights for its population. Below are some of the key findings of this report:

1. **Civil and Political Rights:** Despite New Zealand's democratic stability and press freedom, the rise of disinformation on social media and threats against journalists have raised concerns about the integrity of public debate. Additionally, the state's response to certain protests has been criticised for excessive use of force in some cases.
2. **Gender Equality and Women's Rights:** Although New Zealand has made significant progress in gender pay equity and women's political participation, gender-based violence remains a persistent problem. The lack of equitable access to reproductive health services in rural areas also remains a barrier to full equality.
3. **Indigenous Rights:** Despite the strengthening of co-governance agreements with Māori communities, conflicts persist regarding the management of ancestral lands and the exploitation of natural resources without adequate prior consultation.
4. **Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights:** The housing crisis continues to affect thousands of New Zealanders, particularly low-income communities and indigenous populations. Additionally, access to quality healthcare remains unequal, with prolonged waiting times for specialised treatments.
5. **Rights of Migrants and Refugees:** While New Zealand has expanded its refugee quota and eased some immigration policies, workplace

discrimination and xenophobia remain significant barriers to the integration of these communities.

6. **Child Protection:** Measures have been implemented to strengthen the protection of children and adolescents against violence and exploitation, but child abuse rates remain alarming. The educational gap between urban and rural communities continues to affect equal access to opportunities.
7. **Environment and Human Rights:** New Zealand has made progress in its transition to renewable energy and the protection of natural areas, but the effects of climate change continue to impact vulnerable communities. Legal disputes between the state and indigenous communities over the exploitation of natural resources remain a recurring issue.

Recommendations for Strengthening Human Rights

1. Reinforcement of the Rule of Law and Freedom of Expression

- Implement more effective regulations against disinformation without undermining press freedom.
- Ensure the safety of journalists and human rights defenders against threats and attacks.
- Review police protocols for handling protests to prevent disproportionate use of force.

2. Strengthening Gender Equality

- Implement prevention and education programmes on gender-based violence at all educational levels.
- Ensure universal access to reproductive health services, particularly in rural communities.
- Promote mandatory equal pay policies in the private sector.

3. Guaranteeing Indigenous Rights

- Strengthen mechanisms for free, prior, and informed consultation on projects affecting indigenous lands.
- Expand co-governance agreements and grant Māori communities greater autonomy in managing their territories.
- Implement economic and social support programmes to strengthen the development of indigenous communities.

4. Improvements in Housing, Healthcare, and Education

- Increase investment in social housing to ensure access to dignified housing.
- Reduce waiting times in the public healthcare system by digitising medical services and training more healthcare professionals.
- Implement inclusive education policies to reduce the educational gap between urban and rural areas.

5. Protection of Migrants and Refugees

- Implement more effective integration policies, including access to education, housing, and decent employment.
- Enforce stricter penalties for xenophobia and workplace discrimination against migrants.
- Establish community participation mechanisms to allow migrants to contribute actively to New Zealand society.

6. Actions Against Climate Change and Environmental Protection

- Implement more ambitious policies to reduce carbon emissions.
- Strengthen the protection of vulnerable ecosystems through increased funding for conservation projects.
- Ensure the participation of indigenous and local communities in the formulation of environmental policies.

Final Conclusion

The Human Rights Report on New Zealand in 2024 reflects a country with strong democratic foundations and a continued commitment to equity and justice. However, the identified challenges demonstrate the need to strengthen public policies in multiple areas to ensure that all residents of the country can fully enjoy their fundamental rights.

The future of human rights in New Zealand will depend on the ability of the government, civil society, and affected communities to work together in building a more inclusive, just, and sustainable nation. The implementation of the recommendations outlined here will contribute to consolidating New Zealand's leadership in human rights and improving the quality of life for its people.

Reflection and Future Perspectives

The Ongoing Commitment to Human Rights

The year 2024 has been a period of significant progress and persistent challenges in the promotion and protection of human rights in New Zealand. This report has highlighted both the achievements made and the areas that require greater attention to ensure full respect for the fundamental rights of all citizens. Throughout this analysis, we have identified strengths in the country's legal framework and institutional capacity to address global and local challenges. However, structural obstacles, social inequalities, and the impacts of climate change have demonstrated that the fight for human rights is a process of constant evolution and improvement.

Throughout the chapters of this report, New Zealand's commitment to the principles of equity, justice, and sustainability has been evident. From the protection of civil and political rights to the implementation of environmental policies and the strengthening of economic and social rights, continuous progress has been observed. However, reality shows that no nation is exempt from facing challenges in human rights, and the capacity to respond to these challenges is what distinguishes systems truly committed to justice and equity.

The Role of Civil Society and Citizen Participation

One of the key elements in strengthening human rights is the active participation of civil society. In New Zealand, non-governmental organisations, citizen groups, and human rights defenders have played a fundamental role in highlighting issues and demanding effective government responses. Cooperation between the public sector and civil society has enabled the

implementation of more inclusive policies and more rigorous oversight of the country's international human rights commitments.

Social movements have gained particular relevance in recent years, underscoring the importance of citizen mobilisation to demand justice, equity, and transparency. In 2024, the participation of indigenous communities, women's groups, environmental activists, and migrant organisations has been crucial in ensuring that public policies reflect the needs and demands of all sectors of society. The existence of effective participation channels and the guarantee that all voices are heard and represented are essential pillars for strengthening democracy in the country.

Challenges for the Coming Years

While New Zealand has maintained a notable leadership in various areas of human rights, the country faces significant challenges that will require sustainable, long-term measures. Among the key challenges identified, which will shape the future human rights agenda, are:

1. **Reducing Social Inequality:** Despite the country's economic growth, the gap between privileged sectors and marginalised communities remains a significant obstacle. Child poverty, the housing crisis, and unequal access to education and healthcare continue to affect a considerable portion of the population.
2. **Environmental Protection and Climate Change:** New Zealand must strengthen its sustainability policies and climate change mitigation efforts. Protecting vulnerable ecosystems, reducing carbon emissions, and transitioning to renewable energy sources are critical aspects to ensure the well-being of future generations.

3. **Strengthening the Rights of Migrants and Refugees:** The increasing arrival of migrants and asylum seekers requires comprehensive inclusion strategies and protection against discrimination and xenophobia. The implementation of integration policies that guarantee access to employment, education, and housing will be fundamental to fostering social cohesion.
4. **Combatting Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination:** Despite progress in gender equality, domestic violence and the gender pay gap remain structural problems. Additional efforts are needed to ensure that all women and girls can live free from violence and with equal opportunities.
5. **Respect and Protection of Indigenous Rights:** The full implementation of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi remains a challenge in the relationship between the state and Māori communities. The effective inclusion of indigenous voices in decision-making and the protection of their lands and resources are key aspects in achieving genuine and lasting reconciliation.

Final Reflection: Towards a Future of Justice and Equity

The commitment to human rights cannot be an isolated or temporary effort. Building a fairer, more inclusive, and equitable society requires the active participation of all sectors: the government, civil organisations, the business community, and the general public. New Zealand has proven to be a country with strong institutions and the capacity to implement positive changes, but progress in human rights must not be taken for granted.

This report is not only intended to document the events and policies of 2024 but also to serve as a tool for reflection and action for the future. The defence of human rights is a collective task that demands constant vigilance, ethical commitment, and political decisions based on justice and human dignity.

As New Zealand moves forward in the 21st century, it is imperative to remain steadfast in the purpose of guaranteeing respect for the rights of all people, regardless of origin, gender, economic status, or cultural identity. Only through an approach based on equity and inclusion will it be possible to build a stronger, more resilient society, prepared for the challenges that the future will bring.

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GRAC: Global Rights Action



Websites:

www.gracglobal.org | www.fundaciongrac.org



Address:

372 Annesbrook Drive, Nelson 7011, New Zealand



Phone Numbers:

+64 274 996 766

+64 211 647 827



Emails:

info@gracglobal.org

contact@gracglobal.org



Social Media:

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