**Opening Statement**

**New Zealand Aotearoa UNCRC**

**Introduction**

1. Thank you, Madam Chair.
2. Kei ngā mana, kei ngā ihi, kei ngā tapu – tēnā koutou. E te Komiti Tika Tangata, nei rā ngā mihi o ngā Iwi o Aotearoa ki ā koutou, tēnā koutou.
3. On behalf of the Government of New Zealand, I would like to first thank the Committee for this opportunity to present the work that New Zealand is doing for our children and young people.
4. We view this dialogue as an important forum that provides valuable insights to what we have done and what more we can do.
5. I would like to acknowledge the attendance of the New Zealand Civil Society leaders who are present today.
6. Before I speak further to New Zealand’s activities, I would like to first introduce the delegation.
7. Joining me are:
* Molly Elliott from the Ministry of Social Development. Molly is the General Manager of the Regional Social and Inquiries Policy Group.
* Steve Barnes from the Ministry of Health, Manatū Hauora. Steve is the Group Manager leading the Family and Community Health Policy team.
* Paula Attrill from Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children. Paula is the General Manager for International Casework and Adoption Services.
* Dr David Wales, who is the National Director of Learning Support at the Ministry of Education.
* And Kristie Carter from Te Puni Kōkiri, the Ministry of Māori Development. Kristie is the Director of the Data and Insights team.
1. I am Chappie Te Kani, the Chief Executive Officer at Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children, and I am honored to present New Zealand’s Sixth Periodic Report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
2. I also would like to take a moment to provide brief comments on some of the terminology that will be used in my opening statement and in our responses given that te reo Māori is the indigenous language and one of the official languages of New Zealand.
* Firstly, the indigenous Māori name for New Zealand is ‘Aotearoa’, and New Zealanders use this term interchangeably with ‘New Zealand’ or use them both together as ‘Aotearoa New Zealand’.
* Secondly, it is common for New Zealanders to use Māori language terms in regular English conversation. While we will endeavour to provide English equivalents whenever we use a Māori term, we apologise if we omit any, and invite the Committee to seek further clarity where required.
* Thirdly, the Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand’s founding document and is often referred to as Te Tiriti o Waitangi or “in line with the Government’s obligations under Te Tiriti”.
* Lastly, many of New Zealand Aotearoa’s government ministries are referred to in their Māori names in reference to Te Tiriti such as Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Manatū Hauora – Ministry of Health and Te Puni Kōkiri – the Ministry of Māori Development.

**The situation in New Zealand**

1. New Zealand has a population of 5.1 million people, of whom approximately 1.28 million or 25 percent are under the age of 19 years old.
2. Aotearoa is a welfare state with a publicly funded mandatory education system and tertiary education available to all young people who meet educational requirements. We have a public health system, which is free to children under the age of 14 years old and a child protection system called Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children.
3. Our efforts to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and our commitment to tamariki is based on two main ideals: to make New Zealand a great place to be a child, and to start and raise a family.
4. However, like much of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic affected everyone, with children and young people being among those who were hit the hardest. We acknowledge that the pandemic has exacerbated some of the issues children and young people face, particularly those in vulnerable circumstances.
5. Prior to the pandemic, New Zealand was experiencing progress in reducing child poverty.
6. In 2018, approximately 16.5 percent of children were living in households whose disposable incomes were less than 50 percent of the median before housing costs. In 2021, this rate was reduced to 13.6 percent.
7. In terms of actual numbers:
* approximately 26,000 children had been lifted out of the first measure of child poverty, which calculates the percentage of children living in households with less than 50 percent median income before housing costs are deducted;
* approximately 66,000 children had been lifted out of poverty on the second measure, which calculates the percentage of children living in households with less than 50 percent median income after housing costs are deducted; and
* approximately 22,000 children were no longer experiencing material hardship compared to the year that ended in June 2018.
1. Although these statistics present a positive story, we acknowledge that these numbers are still too high and more must be done.
2. And we are doing more.

**New Zealand’s Commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child**

1. Since New Zealand’s last examination in 2016, we have made progress in advancing children’s rights, particularly in policy and strategy, and legislative reforms, in line with the Committee’s recommendations.
2. In 2017, a new Ministry called Oranga Tamariki, was set up to be responsible for children in the care and protection system.
3. In 2018 and 2019, we announced a series of initiatives aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people and added the Convention on the Rights of the Child into our primary child protection legislation.
4. Some of these initiatives include but are not limited to:
* The introduction of the $5.5 billion Families Package in 2018, which provided additional financial assistance to low- and middle-income families with children. Among the measures introduced were:
	+ increasing the Family Tax Credit and raising the threshold of income permitted before the benefit called Working for Families is abated;
	+ introducing the Best Start tax credit to help families with costs in a child’s early years; and
	+ increasing paid parental leave to 26 weeks as well as the rate of Orphan’s Benefit, Unsupported Child’s Benefit and Foster Care Allowance.
* The expansion of free doctors’ visits from 13 years old to those under 14 years old in 2018.
* And the passing of the Residential Tenancies (Health Homes Standards) Regulations in 2019 to address cold, damp and draughty rentals to help ensure that children living in rentals are in warm, dry and healthy homes.
1. In 2018, we passed the Child Poverty Reduction Act and amended the Children’s Act (2014). The Child Poverty Reduction legislation holds current and future governments to account and requires them to:
* set long-term 10-year and intermediate 3-year targets on a defined set of child poverty measures, some of which I have already highlighted;
* report annually on the set of child poverty measures;
* report each budget day on how the budget will reduce child poverty and how the Government is progressing towards its targets; and
* report on its position on child poverty indicators.
1. The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy was introduced in 2019 and proves to be one of our most significant achievements in bringing a focus on child and youth wellbeing.
2. This overarching, whole-of-government policy framework aims to make New Zealand a place where all children and young people are loved, confident, happy, healthy, and are empowered to reach their full potential.
3. It strives to ensure younger and future generations have the opportunity to thrive and prosper.
4. More than 10,000 New Zealanders helped in developing the Strategy, including over 6000 children and young people who told us what makes for a good life and what gets in the way.
5. To realise the aspirations that we and New Zealanders have set out, a Programme of Action was created. It sets out the Government’s policies, initiatives, programmes, and plans to achieve the vision and desired outcomes of the Strategy.
6. The Wellbeing Budget of 2019 demonstrated the Government’s commitment to children and young people.
7. More than $3.5 billion was committed with funding allocated to:
* addressing family and sexual violence;
* breaking the cycle for children in State care and helping young people live independently;
* increasing funding to schools in lower socioeconomic areas, known as deciles 1 to 7, in order to reduce the financial pressures on parents; and
* linking main benefit levels to inflation (indexation) and removing punitive tax measures as means to lift family incomes.
1. Beyond these announcements, we are continuously examining how to improve existing systems and structures.
2. For instance, the education sector is undergoing a fundamental change.
3. In 2019, following extensive public consultation on the future of education in Aotearoa, the Government released its vision, which reflects the aspirations of New Zealanders to have a more inclusive, equitable, connected and future-focused NZ learning system.
4. This vision is advanced by five overarching objectives for the education system, from early learning through schooling to tertiary and lifelong learning. The objectives are:
	* learners with their whānau are at the centre of education;
	* greater education opportunities and outcomes are within reach for every learner;
	* quality teaching and leadership makes the difference for ākonga—learners and their kaiako—teachers;
	* learning needs to be relevant to the lives of New Zealanders today and throughout their lives, as we meet the changing opportunities and challenges of the future of work; and
	* that we need a world class inclusive public education system that meets the needs of our diverse population, now and in the future.
5. The Education and Training Act was passed in 2020 to bring this vision into effect.
6. And our work to improve the lives of children and young people continues today.
7. In the past 12 months, Aotearoa has introduced the following efforts:
* The passing of the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Bill, which provides an independent monitoring and complaints oversight regime for Oranga Tamariki, the Ministry for Children.
* The enactment of the Children and Young People's Commission Bill, which will commence in July this year to create the Child and Young Peoples Commission to replace the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. This change will allow for greater advocacy of issues related to children and young people.
* The introduction of the Accessibility for New Zealanders Bill in 2022 to address systemic accessibility barriers that prevent disabled people with accessibility needs from living independently and participating in all areas of life.
* The Wellbeing Budget of 2022, which focused on keeping New Zealanders safe from COVID-19 and accelerate recovery from its impacts, include further investments to address child poverty and health.
* The health system has been reformed with the passing of the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) Act 2022, which established a nationwide health service and Te Aka Whai Ora, a dedicated Māori Health Authority. The reformed health system has a clear mandate to protect, promote and improve the health of New Zealanders and achieve equity in health outcomes among New Zealand’s population groups.
* The Budget allocated $14.9 billion for Vote Health over four years, including $168 million over four years for Te Aka Whai Ora’s direct commissioning of services, $1 billion to better support Māori health, education, economic outcomes and cultural wellbeing, $1 billion to the cost‑of‑living package targeted to assist low- and middle-income households and $89.34 million for Mana Ake, which is a holistic mental health programme for children years 1 to 8 and is estimated to reach 195,000 kids.
* The establishment of Whaikaha, the Ministry of Disabled People in mid-2022. Whaikaha has a mandate to lead and coordinate disability policy across government, including improving outcomes for disabled people in areas such as employment, education, health and wellbeing.

**Further improvements to be made**

1. Despite these positive measures, we recognise that we can do more to combat child poverty and the cost of living and to empower our young people.
2. New Zealand recognises that it has three reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which relate to:
* age-mixing in custody;
* legislating for a minimum age of employment; and
* children unlawfully in New Zealand.
1. We look forward to discussing them with you in more detail.
2. Currently, New Zealand is undertaking initiatives, which include but are not limited to:
* improving family contexts, Māori tribal and family contexts (iwi, hapū, whānau), and individuals within a collective and taking a whānau or family-centred approach;
* reducing overrepresentations of Māori, Pacific peoples, and other demographics in poverty and youth crime statistics;
* addressing challenges in providing safe and affordable housing;
* addressing challenges of attendance in education settings; and
* improving mental health and wellbeing among young people.
1. We also have implemented additional measures to safeguard the health and wellbeing of children as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our response continues to evolve.
2. We found that COVID-19 exacerbated some existing inequities, particularly for Māori and Pacific island people in education, work and health. We will discuss the initiatives that we have undertaken to address these further in the review.
3. Overall, New Zealand is committed to ensuring that all children and young people have the opportunity and ability to reach their full potential.
4. We acknowledge that challenges remain, yet we have established a strong foundation to accelerate progress. Through these actions we can make New Zealand a great place to be a child, and to start and raise a family.
5. Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi. With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive.
6. This Māori proverb or whakataukī acknowledges that everyone has something to offer, a piece of the puzzle, and by working together we can flourish and therefore thrive.
7. Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.
8. In the Māori tradition: not once, not twice, but three times I thank you.