

**IN THE ROYAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

**UNDER THE**

Inquiries Act 2013

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

The Royal Commission of Inquiry  
Into Historical Abuse in State Care  
and in the Care of Faith-based  
Institutions

**AND**

**IN THE MATTER OF**

A claim by Michael Rowley (WF –  
007) and; Alfred Coster (I – 0059);  
The New Zealand Collective of  
Abused in State Care Charitable  
Trust.

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**OPENING STATEMENT  
DATED 3 MAY 2021**

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## MAY IT PLEASE THE COMMISSION

1. 2 years ago, I started researching into why my late Grandfather's eldest brother never received his World War 2 medals. I never knew that along the way, I would uncover 133 other soldiers from C Company of the 28<sup>th</sup> (Māori) Battalion who also never received their medals.
2. Just over 2 weeks ago that research led to the New Zealand Defence Force presenting in person to the descendants of those soldiers the original World War 2 medals belonging to those soldiers. It didn't matter that the war had finished 75 years ago, these families wanted those medals presented to them and there were three main reasons for that. Firstly, it was about recognition. Recognition of what their tipuna had endured and had done for our country. Secondly, it was about mana and honouring those soldiers, according to our tikanga. And thirdly, because it was the right thing to do.
3. It mattered not that 75 years had passed. The passage of time had not ameliorated the need to be recognised nor the need for restoration of mana. Nor did it remove from the Crown the need to do the right thing. The same can be said here. It doesn't matter that decades have passed, which in some instances is over 50 plus years.
4. The survivors who elect to come forward do so for the same reason as the families of those soldiers: the recognition of what happened, the restoration of mana, and because it's the right thing to do.

### **Recognition**

5. They need the same thing. Recognition.  
Recognition that what happened to them, was wrong.  
Recognition that what happened to them, should never have happened.  
Recognition that they have been let down by those who were meant to be there to care for them.

### **Mana**

6. They come forward in the hope that their mana will be restored, and to be clear they had it ripped from them in the most horrible of ways. This includes not only their mana, but their dignity and their self-respect.
7. But the truth is very few will come forward. That is because many of them don't trust this Inquiry and view it as a waste of time. They know too that this Inquiry can't give back that which was taken from them. It can't give them back their childhood. It can't give them back their innocence. Nor can it repair the hate, the trauma, the pain, the drugs, the domestic violence, the broken relationships and all the downstream prejudice that comes with being a victim of state abuse. It can't do any of that.

### **What can this Inquiry give?**

8. So what can this Inquiry give the survivors? It can give them a voice and this is important because many feel that they have no voice. And with that voice they want to be heard. This too is important because they've never had that. But they don't want to just tell their story. They want something tangible to come from the telling of their story.
9. From telling their story they want follow up. They want to know that as a result of coming forward, things will happen. In particular, they want justice. They want those responsible for their abuse to be held to account. And they want more than just an apology. They want that apology from the people who harmed them. They want it from the perpetrators.
10. They want the way in which the historical claims process is administered completely changed. They want it to be more mana enhancing. They want to bring their whanau with them, those who supported them when the Crown didn't. It has to be more than just a box ticking exercise. They want tikanga to be part of the process, just as the Army for the first time in its history incorporated tikanga Māori when they presented those medals, survivors of Māori descent want tikanga involved in how their cases are managed.
11. When we had our medals presentation in Gisborne, we didn't get every family come forward. We had exactly half come forward. But after the presentation, when all Māoridom found out about the Kaupapa, many, many more came forward because they too wanted the same thing: to honour and recognise their tipuna. And the New Zealand Collective of Abused in State Care Charitable Trust hopes the same thing will happen here. It is genuinely hoped that with the formation of the Trust, more and more survivors will come forward and more and more survivors will use this process, which is only the beginning of what the Trust will implement in respect of priorities, policy design and leading survivors forward. In particular is after care which is sorely needed. Just like the soldiers who didn't get the rehabilitation they needed upon returning from war, the survivors too didn't get the help they needed. And this Inquiry is part of that rehabilitation.
12. It is hoped that the common cause of wanting recognition and restoration of mana will be enough to bind the thousands of survivors together. It is hoped that this process maybe the beginning of that process. And that perhaps is the greatest gift this process can give survivors. Hope. Hope that people will come together. Hope that they will get the recognition they need. Hope that their mana will be restored. Hope that they will get a voice and be listened to. Hope that they will get justice. And that's why they will now join this process.

**DATED** at Auckland this 3 May 2021.



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**David Martin Stone**

**Azania Watene**

TO: The Solicitor Assisting of the The Royal Commission of Inquiry Into Historical Abuse in State Care and in the Care of Faith-based Institutions.