

Laudatory speech for Pauline Tangiora

Speaker: Karin Meißenburg



Kuia Pauline Tangiora has worked effectively in an extraordinary way both internationally as well as nationally. In Maori culture „kuia” is a term of honour for a wise elder woman and refers to being a leader in her iwi, her tribe, and it also means grandmother. Her life is abundant with peace work in all central areas like the self-determination and the rights of indigenous peoples, the whole nuclear issue including disarmament, prevention of war through conflict-mediation, climate change, a wholesome understanding of nature and our environment, food security, creative education, energy politics, safeguarding water, restorative justice both locally and globally. This happens through a lengthy dialogue in which all parties of a crime come to a satisfying solution. In fact, all conceivable themes of human life and coexistence are touched. To sketch briefly her work in 36 international organizations and in more than 50 responsible national and international positions would take more than a day. (s. www.disarm-secure.org/people/pauline.php)

For her hugely comprehensive commitment to peace in all realms, nature as well as human, I have chosen a few national and international examples. But I start this honouring of kuia Pauline Tangiora with her private life. Why?

A young Swiss interviewer asked in spring this year: “What are the accomplishments in your life you are most proud of?” Kuia Pauline Tangiora answered without hesitation smilingly: “My family, of course. I have fourteen children, I have two families, one my own family of eight and my other family of six, my fiftytwo grandchildren and by now ten great grandchildren. And that is my biggest accomplishment. To be around to see the three generations. So I have a responsibility to those generations, you see.” Add to this family her adopted children globally. (see Pauline Tangiora Interview: Maori elder and Environmental Activist, 7. April 2017, The Update, Online Newspaper)

The small and the large are alike in essence from a blade of flax to the stars. The fullness of her family life, which together with relatives might form a small village, is the ground her life for peace is founded on. It is the centre from which her activities develop embracing the world from a blade of flax to the stars. In this centre kuia Pauline Tangiora is anchored wherever she is. The oneness of all being is moving her with an urgency her responsibility is compelling her to. (online Gisborne Herald, 20 August 2017, „Innate instinct to stand up for others“ by Michael Nelson)

On this self-identification her commitment to peace is based. From childhood on she stood up for those who could not yet stand up for themselves: first in her schoolyard, later local conflicts have been resolved, and for almost fifty years now, she got involved with and for people in prison. She is an advocate for the rights of indigenous peoples. The call for ending all wars (Pauline Tangiora Interview: Maori Elder and Environmental Activist, 7 April 2017, The Update, Online Newspaper) is directed towards humanity as well as with nature in all their manifestations.

In 1981 Maori elders, among them Pauline Tangiora and her husband, founded Maori language and tikanga/life practice immersion pre-schools throughout Aotearoa; followed by primary and secondary schools; later three universities. Here the schools for the future have been created: a cooperative, creative, project-oriented togetherness, anchored in their ancient culture grounded in wairua (spirit). For almost twenty years they did not receive any substantial financial support by the government. So creative solutions through community work were required and strengthened the movement. This is where Pauline Tangiora's roots are for her global continuous advocacy for the self-determination of indigenous peoples: a contribution to peace. Alongside it, she is passionate about empowering the younger generation. In turn, her husband empowered her: "It's time for Maori to move into the international field and as Maori we have something to offer. Especially Maori women have something to offer." He had the foresight to prepare for us as Maori to move out. And for me personally to set us on the road to seeing what we can do on a wider field besides our own backyard. That's how it actually started. I went on a peace caravan across North America. When I came to New York, I was the only one of originally 8 indigenous women. We moved from one state to the next ... until we finally arrived at the Big Mountain [in Arizona]." That was 1986. There the peace caravan supported the Dineh and Hopi against the confiscation of their land, the mining of uranium thereby desecrating and desolating it. On their way with the peace caravan they came to Philadelphia and visited the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. For Pauline Tangiora her first international organization. The women were all in their 80s and 90s. They took to her spiritedness and she became a member of the League right then and there. (See the impressive documentary by Kathleen Gallagher „Tau Te Mauri – A Breath of Peace“)

This is how the international peace work began for kuia Pauline Tangiora. Again and again she is asked to join international organizations. Like Peace Foundation Aotearoa New Zealand, Disarmament and Security Centre Otautahi, Maori Women's Welfare League, Rigoberta Menchu's Indigenous Initiative for Peace, Earth Charter, Earth Council, World Future Council, and The International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers (see documentary movie "For the Next 7 Generations").

There is no continent where her humanity has not contributed to peace. Down to earth, that is nature is respected in its precarious balance in all dimensions; down to earth, that is practical, moving step by step. In this vein, the Earth Charter is a wonderful tool helping orientation.

(s. Feather Project Wisdom: "Maori Tribal Elder Pauline Tangiora" at youtube) Again and again Kuia encourages the younger generation facing the oppressive future burden to start with smaller steps and to trust that this will have positive traction. Something her life shows clearly.

(Grandmother Pauline Tangiora at Initiative Forum (IF) Sweden, 2017, Vimeo, 03 May 2017)

According to Kuia: The nuclear issue is the fourfold most pressing problem to be addressed for the welfare of our world, for the future generations to have a place to live. Firstly, the mining of uranium destroying indigenous lands, secondly, the so-called civil use for nuclear power plants, thirdly, as an instrument of war, fourthly, the handling of nuclear waste. (see web for World Future Council interviewing Pauline Tangiora in 2008)

After a long political and activist fight, Aotearoa New Zealand became nuclear free in all four problem areas in 1984. However, Pauline Tangiora has witnessed the nuclear destruction in the South Pacific while raising her children in the 50s and 60s. To make people aware of this genocide was one of the reasons for participating in the peace caravan through the United States. Hence her alarm when large parts of Iraq were bombed with depleted uranium in two decades. Many of their younger generations will never see adulthood. In all those cases, the dialogue between the old and the young generations for the future welfare of each of the cultures has been extinguished. Yet this dialogue is vital for the world with its diverse cultures, for cultures flourish only when a wholesome and visionary dialogue between the older generation and the youth is possible.

In 2003 during the time of the embargo Kuia Pauline Tangiora visited Iraq. Why? In her own words: „The reason for going was a concern for women and children and what is happening with the threat of war from America and Britain on the Iraq people. My first statement would need to be that in

1991 depleted uranium was used by the allied forces on these people of Iraq. In my opinion this is classified as warheads of mass destruction and is a criminal and immoral usage on civilians or any other persons. It was from this perspective that I have looked at my visit to this country. An act of aggression that is bound to take place again may use these depleted uranium warheads.” (s. Iraq Report, <http://www.disarmsecure.org/people/pauline.php>)

She travels the country, visits families, talks to people in the street, goes to a hospital. Here mothers were with their children in the last stages of cancer, a result of the radioactive bombardment of Iraq first by Iran, then through the US and their allies. She tells a conference of young adults in Sweden how shaken she was seeing these young women with their dying children on beds with mattresses but no bedding. She had brought along pencils and notebooks, as well as ointments and natural manuka honey cream for the scab infested legs of the women. The children drew intently with their free hand while the other was attached to a blood transfusion tube which was made of rubber tires. These little drawings will be a witness for the mothers for a child that no longer is. What makes human beings do this to others, she asks. A whole generation of children will never reach adulthood. (Grandmother Pauline Tangiora at Initiative Forum (IF) Sweden, 2017, Vimeo, 03 May 2017)

Kuia Pauline Tangiora is very concerned with dialogues between the old generation with the young one, while the middle generation is often primarily occupied by their careers. Dialogues about the future of the earth. In Iraq the earth is contaminated. Water and soil are too toxic to let anything edible grow.

What gives Pauline Tangiora the strength to live this kind of fullness of life with all its contradictions? What is the spiritual principle on which her work is based which upholds it? It is found in the spirituality of her Maori culture pervading everyday life. Mana characterises it: authority, spiritual power, a spiritual gift delegated by the atua, by divinity. Man remains the agent, never the source of mana. This spiritual outlook is the root of the web of coexistence, of togetherness which characterizes her life practice. And here is the home of a vital word for Pauline Tangiora: respect. Respect for the overall web of this world as it manifests itself in all life forms. Respect also for those with whose mode of operation she disagrees.

(s. Pauline Tangiora Interview: Maori elder and Environmental Activist, 7. April 2017, The Update, Online Newspaper)

Beyond that, her strength is supported by the village community, by the encouraging longtime cooperation with the Maori Women's Welfare League. This organisation stands for families and without peace you cannot have families. Similarly, the continued support through the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom she came to know through the peace caravan. The comprehensive commitment of the Disarmament and Security Centre Otautahi with its many pathways of helping hands. It corroborates the Maori proverb: My strength is not of my own but of the multitude. (Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini.)

Again and again Kuia Pauline Tangiora calls for a change of consciousness in her committee work. This is so evident in the negotiations for the deed of settlement concerning the land confiscation and the attempted genocide through the European colonisers of Aotearoa. Also the Rongomaiwahine tribe was affected. On one side there was the understandable thought of revenge, on the other side the greed and denial. Both had to be overcome in order to achieve a consensus. Tough negotiating for 30 years. Pauline was from the start one of the seven negotiators on the Maori side. On 26 November 2016 the deed of settlement was finally signed between the British Crown, represented by the government of New Zealand and the Wairoa District, into which also Rongomaiwahine were subsumed. The essential part was the apology of the Crown for the abuse of their rights and the confiscation of their land, a settlement and a social assistance package. The 100 Million Dollars come to 0,1% of the damage caused.

(online Gisborne Herald, 20 August 2017, „Innate instinct to stand up for others“ by Michael Nelson)

Many delegates of indigenous peoples come to Maori for counsel on how to deal with colonizers. How to deal with historical injustices, which are ignored, how to deal with guilt and reconciliation, for pathways to a consensus between the counterparties, the opponents, the enemies.

Thus Kuia Pauline Tangiora is called again and again. These worldwide activities are sometimes life threatening. Her telephone is tapped. At borders, airports she is stopped, kept for hours on end. She is not to be flustered or deterred. (s. Grandmother Pauline Tangiora at Initiative Forum (IF) Sweden, 2017, Vimeo, 03 May 2017) Another Maori proverb may indicate the essence of her life: Manaaki whenua, manaaki tangata, haere whakamua. Enrich the mana of the land, enrich the mana of the people, go forward. The primal substance of mana is arohanoa, unconditional, all-embracing Love. This you impart in superabundance. Thank you for the grace of your life. Your life a taonga, a sacred gift to the world.

Thank you
Karin Meißenburg

