TUMU TE HEUHEU (TE HEUHEU TÜKINO VIII)

Ko Tongariro te maunga
Ko Tauponui-a-Tia te moana
Ko Tuwharetoa te iwi
Ko Te Heuheu te tangata

Tumu Te Heuheu (Te Heuheu Tükino VIII), Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit and Paramount Chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa of the central North Island, has inherited the mantle of a long line of Ngāti Tūwharetoa paramount chiefs who played key roles in New Zealand history through their pan-tribal influence.

In 1856 Iwikau Te Heuheu (Te Heuheu Tükino III) hosted a gathering of rangatira from all over the country at Pūkawa on the shores of Lake Taupo, uniting them in opposition to further loss of land and authority under the government of the day. Among the topics discussed was the establishment of a Māori King. Iwikau did not seek the position himself but he supported the installation of Pōtatau Te Wherowhero of Tainui waka at Ngāruawāhia in 1858. The heads of Ngāti Tūwharetoa and the Kīngitanga have been linked in a special relationship ever since.

As paramount chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Horonuku Te Heuheu (Te Heuheu Tükino IV) gifted the mountains Tongariro, Ngauruhoe and Ruapehu to the people of New Zealand. This gift formed the nucleus of New Zealand’s first National Park. Only the fourth national park in the world, it was also the first resulting from the gift of an indigenous people.

In the late 20th century, Sir Hepi Te Heuheu (Te Heuheu Tükino VII) called Māori leaders together on many occasions to discuss common concerns. In particular he played a key role in the establishment of the National Māori Congress and the co-ordination of opposition to the Government’s “fiscal envelope” capping the amount of compensation available for breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi.

As Sir Hepi’s eldest son, Tumu Te Heuheu was heir to a proud tradition of leadership and service. Educated at St Patrick’s College Silverstream in the 1950s, he served a long apprenticeship under his father’s eye, working on the family farm and helping direct development of Ngāti Tūwharetoa’s land incorporations and economic enterprises. When Sir Hepi died in 1997 Ngāti Tūwharetoa installed Tumu Te Heuheu as their paramount chief.
Both before and since his accession Tumu Te Heuheu has consistently pursued interests in conservation, cultural heritage and education within and beyond Ngāti Tūwharetoa. From its inception in 1991 he chaired Ngā Whenua Rāhui, a government funded programme to assist the conservation of natural resources on Māori-owned land. In 1996 he became a member of the Waitangi National Trust Board, succeeding Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu in representing Māori living in the North Island south of Auckland. He succeeded his father as Chairman of the Tūwharetoa Trust Board in 1997 and was appointed Chairman of the Lake Taupo and Lake Rotoaira Forest Trusts by the beneficial owners. He has been a member of the Heritage Council of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust for a number of years and is Chairman of its Māori Heritage Council. Between 2001 and 2007 Tumu Te Heuheu played a key role in bringing Government and Māori from all over the country together in a series of Hui Taumata Mātauranga (Māori Educational Summits) at Pūkawa.

As well as working to conserve the heritage of Tongariro National Park and New Zealand’s environment generally, Tumu Te Heuheu has extended Tūwharetoa’s influence—and hence New Zealand’s—into the global arena. After Tongariro National Park was inscribed in the World Heritage list in 1990 on the basis of its physical, volcanic features, he led the successful bid for recognition of its spiritual and cultural value in 1993. At that time it was one of a handful of sites with dual listing. In 2004 Tumu Te Heuheu was elected to a seat on the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Paris representing New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific. That year he hosted UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura when he visited Tongariro National Park to discuss the significance of this World Heritage site to Māori and ways of protecting intangible cultural values. In 2006 Tumu Te Heuheu was elected Chairman of the World Heritage Committee at the 30th Session held in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius. During his year in this position he advanced the Pacific 2009 Action Plan developed at Tongariro in 2004, held meetings with ministers from countries all over the world, facilitated constructive dialogue between Arab and Israeli delegates over a heritage site in Jerusalem and chaired the 31st Session of the Committee in Christchurch in 2006.

Tumu Te Heuheu’s work for conservation and education was recognised in 2005 in the New Years Honours when he was made a Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit. In 2007 Massey University conferred the degree of Honorary Doctor of Literature on him at a ceremony held at Waihī on the shores of Lake Taupo. The citation acknowledged the contribution he had made to conservation both nationally and internationally and the role he had taken in developing educational pathways for Māori.
The special relationship between Ngāti Tūwharetoa and the Kingitanga came into play in 2006 when Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikaahu died. Tumu Te Heuheu played a leading part in the choosing of her successor and escorted her son Tuheitia onto the marae at Tūrangawaewae for his coronation.

After leading Ngāti Tūwharetoa in bilateral negotiations with the Crown for many years, Tumu Te Heuheu played a leading part in the formation of the Central North Island Collective of six iwi, the formulation of the Collective’s proposal for settling the Central North Island Forest claim, and negotiations with the Crown that are currently in their final stages.

In accepting the invitation to be joint Patron of the Polynesian Society, Tumu Te Heuheu revives a link established in 1892 by his great-grandfather Tūreiti Te Heuheu (Te Heuheu Tūkino V) as one of the Society’s first members and reinforces the ties of friendship binding him to Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi since their schooldays in Wellington.

Dame Joan Metge
President, The Polynesian Society

REFERENCES


