

MEDIA RELEASE

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Auckland Rotuman Group makes a Human Rights complaint against the NZ Ministry of Pacific People

The **Auckland Rotuman Fellowship Group Incorporated (ARFGI)** is marking today's **International Human Rights Day** to draw attention to the NZ Government's discriminatory policy of only supporting selective Pacific Island languages.

ARFGI has today made a complaint to the **NZ Human Rights Commission** against the **Ministry of Pacific Peoples (MPP)** on the grounds of unlawful discrimination against the **Rotuman language** and the annual **Rotuman Language Week** event.

ARFGI has been unsuccessfully trying for over two years to get the Ministry of Pacific Peoples (MPP) to officially recognise the annual Rotuman Language Week and list it on the MPP website.

ARFGI questions MPPs' commitment to Pacific languages, and why the Government is selectively only supporting 7 Pacific languages, when there are over 40 Pacific communities living in New Zealand-Aotearoa.

ARFGI believes Government Services should not discriminate on the grounds of ethnic or national origins.

The Group's members are deeply hurt and aggrieved at being treated unfairly and less favourably by Ministry of Pacific Peoples.

ARFGI has been running weekly language classes and annual language weeks, using its own funds and resources, as part of the Communities efforts to save this unique and endangered language.

This year is the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages.

The Rotuman language is listed on UNESCO's list of the World's Endangered Languages.

Minister for Pacific Peoples, Honourable Aupito William Sio, recently said that "for Pacific people, language can be a source of strength. It can help ground us and give us confidence."

ARFGI General Secretary Rachael Mario questioned the Minister's intentions : "It appears that the Honourable Minister is paying lip-service to this commitment to Pacific Languages. He is actually undermining our Pacific identity. As he is selectively only supporting 7 Pacific languages. Does the Government feel some languages are more important than others? Or is the Minister playing politics with our languages – and only supporting those groups that have greater populations and more influence".

Ms Mario added : "It doesn't make sense? Our community is using its own funds to desperately try and ensure the survival of our beautiful and unique language – and yet the Ministry that is supposed to represent us is saying they cannot help as they claim they do not receive money for our language! Yet MPP allocate funds and resources for 7 other Pacific languages. Plus we are using our own money. Could it be that MPP want us to pay them so that we can get their support and have our Rotuman Language Week listed on their website?"

The Rotuman Language Week 2020 has been announced for 10 to 17 May 2020.

MPP have again advised ARFGI that they can only list the 7 Language Weeks that MPP officially fund and support (see internet link <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/language-culture-and-identity/pacific-language-weeks/>).

"Furthermore, despite much effort and engagement with MPP, there is even more bias on the Ministry of Pacific People's website as it does not list the Rotuman language greeting "Noa'ia e Mauri" or many other Pacific community's greetings. But it again selectively lists a few greetings on its Home Page's first paragraph and Welcome (see internet link <https://www.mpp.govt.nz/>).

"Sadly the Ministry of Pacific Peoples have again refused to list our Language Week next year on their website. All we want is to be treated fairly and equally", Ms Mario re-iterated.

ARFGI hopes that as today is International Human Rights Day, and this year is the United Nations Year of Indigenous Languages, that fairness and common sense will eventually prevail, and the human rights and aspirations of communities and their languages will be respected and fully supported in Aotearoa.

Footnotes :

- Rotuman people are a separate ethnic group with their own distinct language, culture and identity, and originate from the Polynesian Island of Rotuma.
- Rotuma consists of the island of Rotuma and its nearby islets, and is located in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, about 500 kms north of Fiji, and 500 kms west of Wallis & Futuna.
- Rotuma was annexed by the British on 13 May 1881 ('Rotuma Day'). Although Rotuma is its own nation, it is currently administered by Fiji as a dependency.
- Wikipedia article on the Rotuman language https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotuman_language
- Rotuma is described as an 'untouched paradise' with some of the world's most pristine and beautiful beaches.

For more information : please email : info@rotuma.website, or telephone Rachael Mario 021-2559956 (General Secretary, ARFGI)

