

**The Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, GNZM, QSO
Governor-General of New Zealand
Launch of the Centre for Informed Futures
Government House Auckland
4 March 2020**

E nga mana tiketike, rau rangatira ma.

Tenei aku mihi nui ki a koutou, i runga i tenei kaupapa nui,
e whakahuihui nei i a tātou.

Nau mai, haere mai ki te Whare Kawana.

It's a great privilege and a real pleasure to welcome you all to Government House this evening to celebrate the official launch of the Centre for Informed Futures.

This bold and ambitious project will help us here in Aotearoa New Zealand and in other nations, make more informed choices about the way we live in the 21st century.

The Centre has identified deep-seated challenges as research themes – and I paraphrase here:

- How to counter misinformation and develop better understanding about who and what can be trusted.
- How to bridge divides, so that we feel connected with each other.
- How to make good decisions about our relationships with technology and regulation of the digital revolution.
- How to think about the kind of trade-offs we need to make in order to live in a sustainable environment.
- And how we can ensure that individuals become more resilient, as we deal with the challenges of technological innovation, particularly the digital world.

If ever we needed a reminder that these are all urgent global issues, our recent introduction to the risks and implications of the novel corona virus has illustrated the relevance of the Centre's research themes.

How do we disseminate accurate and reliable information about COVID-19 that people will trust? And what can we do when dubious social media feeds are the main source of news for many?

What happens to social cohesion when people fear contagion, go into lock-down and stop communicating face-to-face?

How does anxiety about the virus impact on personal resilience, particularly with relation to the mental health of our young people?

And how do we build on the momentum to address our pressing environmental issues when the public focus is diverted to the unfolding situation with COVID-19?

The Centre's approach brings to mind the Māori legend of Tāne, the god of the forests, who ascended to the twelfth heaven to obtain the three baskets of knowledge:

- te kete tuauri, sacred knowledge;
- te kete tuatea, ancestral knowledge; and
- te kete aronui, the basket of aroha, peace and the arts – being knowledge obtained through careful observation of the environment.

This traditional story from Maori mythology tells us that wisdom must draw on the knowledge from all three baskets – so we can understand social and cultural dimensions as well as scientific findings.

No one discipline has all the answers, and a mosaic of information needs to be assembled from various knowledge systems, world views and disciplines.

While noting the importance of the interdisciplinary nature of the Centre's work, I feel compelled to put in a plug for the arts.

We can think back to the powerful impact of Hone Tuwhare's poetry, Ralph Hotere's paintings, and of Herbs' song *French Letter* in conveying powerful messages against nuclear testing in the Pacific,

Or a more recent example - Taika Waititi's on-line contribution to the Human Rights Commission campaign, *Give Nothing to Racism*,

or indeed decades of performances by the Topp Twins.

It seems to me that the creative insights of our film-makers, poets, visual artists, philosophers and singer-songwriters can not only reflect the zeitgeist, but also help shift it with messaging that resonates with a wide range of New Zealanders.

They may be able to provide valuable support in ensuring the learnings from the Centre are widely heard and understood.

The future seems to be hurtling towards us at great speed, and we have a duty to wrestle with the big issues and move forward in ways that are good for the wellbeing of human society and the planet.

We do well to follow the example of Sir Peter Gluckman who, when asked whether he is an optimist or pessimist, replies that he is a pragmatist.

Sir Peter clearly believes that human beings have the wherewithal to understand their world and do the right thing by it. In my book, that is cause for optimism.

With his track-record of energetic leadership, articulation of the issues, polymath curiosity, and determination to reach across the divides between academia, civil society and policy development, I have every confidence that the Centre will shift thinking into new pathways that will benefit both humanity and our natural world.

Sir Peter, I am sure everyone here tonight shares your goal to take a more purposeful, informed approach towards the way we live our lives, the decisions we make, and our goals for the future.

I am happy to assist you in any way I can in the remaining 18 months of my term and I will certainly be following the progress of your team in the years ahead.

I wish the Centre for Informed Futures great success, for the sake of us all.

I now invite Kaiārahi Michael Steedman, to speak.