

MEDIA RELEASE

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New Kiwi organisation reminding us all that Humanity Matters

This Friday, 10 December 2021, the world will celebrate International Human Rights Day. It also marks the launch of new Kiwi Human Rights organisation, “Humanity Matters New Zealand”, and the launch of its first project, funded by InternetNZ, researching the impact of dangerous online hate speech in Aotearoa on the local Jewish community.

Humanity Matters New Zealand is the brainchild of former teacher and CEO of the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand, Chris Harris, and was established when he identified a gap in Aotearoa for an organisation that focused specifically on the lack of education in New Zealand schools on the topic of Humanity.

“Everything starts with education because the seeds of racism and discrimination are planted young. We have to educate our tamariki about the rich diversity of this world, that being ‘different’ isn’t really that different at all. That it’s our rich diversity - our one Humanity - that ultimately makes us all stronger.”

With a primary focus on human rights in the key areas of race, ethnicity, sexuality and gender, and specialisations in antisemitism and genocide, a key objective of Humanity Matters NZ is to provide curriculum-based materials for teachers on human rights and case studies on genocides around the world.

“Our resources will enable teachers to create a safe place for students to talk openly about their ideas and bring to the surface misunderstandings and misconceptions so that teachers can address those. Current students go on to become the future adults of our country. We need to be educating our next generations of Kiwis to be more accepting, understanding, compassionate and embracing of diversity - to arm them with a solid education based on fact, not bigotry”, Chris says.

In addition to working with schools, Humanity Matters will also partner with NGOs, corporates and government agencies, to offer strategic consulting services, as well as take an advocacy role in the media and political forums.

“We know that, unfortunately, intolerance isn’t an issue that just affects our young people - many New Zealanders have grown up in a society that was far less accepting and welcoming than the one Humanity Matters NZ is working to create. And we can’t do that alone – we encourage organisations to get in touch with us to find out how we can work together to change that,” he says.

In November, Humanity Matters received a grant from InternetNZ to undertake a research project focused on identifying the impact of dangerous online hate speech in Aotearoa on the local Jewish community. Covid-19 and the constant lines drawn between the nationwide vaccination campaign and the atrocities of the Holocaust, will provide much food for thought.

“This study is about gaining a deeper understanding of the issues that underpin online antisemitism within the Aotearoa context. Very little research has been conducted in this area to date; and Covid-19 has unfortunately created a lot more content to study on this topic. The research project will produce essential data for developing relevant educational strategies designed to combat online abuse, as well as develop a set of tools that could potentially support other minority communities in pursuing similar strategies”, he says.

The ultimate goal of the new organisation is to work towards creating a New Zealand where we no longer have to remind people that humanity matters: “That we currently need reminding, is a

problem. Humanity matters because we are all global citizens - and we all have a responsibility to make sure that every person has a place in this world no matter who they are, what they believe, what they look like.”

Humanity Matters NZ is overseen by an independent advisory Board *consisting of representatives from Māori, Pasifika, LGBTQi, Muslim, Education communities, as well as experts on a variety of human rights subjects and an ex-Cabinet Minister*. To find out more about Humanity Matters New Zealand, our research or support our work, please contact Chris Harris at: chris@humanitymatters.org.nz or visit www.humanitymatters.org.nz

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