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NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSION

TE AKA AORERE

LONDON

17 April 2007

Mr Neil MacGregor
Director
The British Museum
London
WC1B 3DG

Dear Mr MacGregor

I understand that the British Museum is currently considering a request by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa) to repatriate 16 Māori human remains held in its collection. I am writing to advise you of the New Zealand Government's position on the matter, and to offer my strong personal support for Te Papa's repatriation programme.

Te Papa was mandated by the New Zealand Government in early 2003 to conduct a repatriation programme (Karanga Aotearoa) for the return of all kōiwi tangata (Māori and Moriori human remains) from overseas institutions and museums, and domestically back to their iwi (tribes), where possible. Over the past few years, it has approached a number of institutions which hold Māori human remains in their collections, requesting that such remains be repatriated to New Zealand. In making these requests and conducting the repatriations, Te Papa has the full support and endorsement of the New Zealand Government. The New Zealand Government's role in the process is mainly one of facilitation of Te Papa's work – it does not claim ownership of the kōiwi which Te Papa is seeking to repatriate.

Te Papa's repatriation programme and government policy is governed by several general principles: that repatriation from overseas institutions and individuals is by mutual agreement only; no payment for kōiwi will be made to overseas institutions; kōiwi must be identified as originating from New Zealand; and Maori are to be involved in the repatriation of kōiwi, and to determine the final resting place, where possible.

In relation to Te Papa's request to the British Museum to repatriate the 7 Toi moki and 9 kōiwi currently held by the Museum, it is important to note that the kōiwi tangata being claimed are less than 300 years old; the repatriation

NEW ZEALAND HOUSE 80 HAYMARKET LONDON SW1Y 4TQ
TELEPHONE (020) 7930 8422 FACSIMILE (020) 7839 4580

programme is supported by iwi; and the human remains in question have clear provenance to New Zealand as per British Museum accession registers and other supporting documents. I should also emphasise that the kōiwi tangata are immensely sacred to Māori, and the desire of Māori to have their tupuna (ancestors) returned has not, and will not, diminish over time.

I trust that you, and British Museum's Trustees, find the above information useful in your consideration of Te Papa's request. I do hope that satisfactory arrangements for the return of the kōiwi tangata can be reached.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jonathan Hunt', is written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Jonathan Hunt ONZ
High Commissioner for New Zealand