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Ministry of Women's Affairs
Address given at Ara Toi Art Gallery, Masterton
Friday, 18 April 2008

Mana Wahine Week event

E te whare, tēnā koe.

E ngā kuia mā, ngā koro, ngā wahine, ngā tane, ngā kotiro ma, ngā tama mā, kei te mihi au ki te kaupapa o te rā – mana wahine, tēnei te mihi mahana ki a koutou katoa.

Mana Wahine Week is a national event that the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA) has celebrated annually since 1993. MWA became involved with this event to celebrate the important role and achievements of Māori women as tangata whenua and to highlight the contributions that Māori women make to their communities and to the whole economy.

Last year, in conjunction with Te Puni Kōkiri, we held regional events to celebrate Māori women as kaiārahi – leaders, kaihanga pakihi – entrepreneurs, and kaiuaha – innovators. This year, in partnership with the Māori Women's Welfare League, our focus is on recognising and acknowledging the achievements and success stories of leading Māori women in their communities, the 'unsung heroes'.

Today we are here to pay tribute to the 12 Māori women – all talented and successful artists. Art is an area with which I am a little bit familiar with as for some three hard-out years, I was crazy enough to own an art gallery. The core business was Māori art – I believe that it is marketable; ataahua and essential to who we are. Let me read you a quote that I found on Toi Māori's website:

'Māori art is inseparable from Māori culture. It is like a living organism that exists in the spirit of our people and drives them toward wider horizons and greater achievement.'

Now, as many of you know, I am Kaihautū at the Ministry of Women's Affairs. One of the main areas in which the Ministry focuses its work is finding suitable women candidates and putting their names forward for state sector boards. Perhaps some of you are, or could be, those candidates.

You may be wondering what do you need to be on a board? What skills do you have to have as feathers on your korowai? Some of you may be wondering why we need women on boards. There are many reasons why – not least is the recent international research that shows companies with more women on their boards actually do better, on average, than those with fewer women.

New Zealand needs more women on boards. Being a member of a board is a big responsibility and it doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to gain the qualifications and experience needed.

So, apart from being brown, stunning and on to it, you need to:

- Have the time to devote yourself to the role – the Institute of Directors recommends two hours of preparation time for every one hour spent in a board meeting.
- Play an active role in meetings – contribute, ask questions, request more information, challenge assumptions, provide solutions.
- Maintain the highest personal and professional standards.
- Understand the issues facing the organisation and the environment it works in.
- But more importantly, you need to be board ready; a star in your own job; have a track record; be a high flier; be a high performer.

All of these Māori women artists here today are a mixture of those qualities.

- MWA nominations database: 42 percent public sector are women – goal is 50 percent by 2010. We need to work very hard.
- 7 percent private sector are women? How can we influence this percentage?

One way we can do that is by ensuring we keep an eye out for our women who fit the criteria and tapping them on the shoulder, or whispering in their ear. If they already have the skills and qualifications, encourage them to put their names forward. Contact me OR look at our website. If they don't, encourage and support them to gain the skills and qualifications needed.

Another way to get more women on boards is to make sure there is someone to pass the rakau on to. We need to keep an eye on our rangatahi who will be the leaders of the future. Give them the time, the guidance and the resources they need to one day step into others' shoes.

Māori women are the drivers in their whānau, homes, work – care for both young and elderly, and kaitiaki of their environment. Our Māori men have complimentary roles, and need to step up to walk the talk with our Māori women. There is an array of Māori women in communities who are role models and leaders here with us today. And to our Māori women that we are honoring tonight, kei te mihi aroha ki a koutou katoa.

Ki a au, kei te ora te wahine, kei te ora hoki te whanau!
No reira, ngā rangatira mā, ngā whanaunga, anei te korero.

'Whaia e koe te iti kahurangi, ki te tūohu koe, me maunga teitei!'