

STATEMENT OF SOCIAL CONCERN made by 1998 Yearly Meeting

Friends' belief in that of God in everyone leads us to work for a society in which everyone is valued and everyone is enabled to use their gifts to the full.

We are concerned that since 1984 New Zealand society has been moving in the opposite direction. We see policies pursued by successive governments as socially destructive. We realise that many among those who have initiated and who support these policies have done so in the belief that the ends they seek are good ones. Present conditions are evidence of failure to achieve desirable outcomes.

Indicators of social distress are high and have increased on former rates. This applies to unemployment, crime, depression and suicide, child abuse, domestic violence, broken families and homelessness. The gap between rich and poor has been increased. Those who are poorest find it almost impossible to climb out of the poverty trap.

Present policies erode the bonds of trust and respect on which our sense of community is based. They impoverish our spiritual lives through loss of compassion for others. They endanger the well-being of present and future generations.

At least as disturbing as the substance of these policies is their spirit. This spirit is implied in the public discussion document "Towards a Code of Social & Family Responsibility". It is a spirit of meanness and lack of imagination, which blames the poor for their poverty. It ignores the fact that economic policy since 1984 has created high unemployment and therefore results in more beneficiaries. Every policy decision needs to be made in the light of its human consequences.

We urge concerned people to speak and act now. We need to remind government that exercising fiscal responsibility does not imply measuring the success of a country or its government only by economic indicators. Many of the things we value most in society cannot be measured in that way.

We call for a response from all who see this time as an opportunity to transform an economic and social system based on exclusion into a society which recognises that social justice cannot be achieved at the expense of other people.

We also call on our own community to look within our hearts, for as Friends we believe that the seeds of the present policies have nourishment in our attachment to possessions, our collusion with consumerism, our complacency, and even in our unrecognised elitism and mono-culturalism.