

## **PM: Hillary Institute Inaugural Dinner Speech**

**Friday, 6 June 2008, 12:50 pm**  
**Speech: New Zealand Government**

**Thursday 5 June 2008**

**Rt Hon Helen Clark**  
**Prime Minister**

**Address at**  
**The Hillary Institute Inaugural Dinner**

**Christchurch Art Gallery**  
**Christchurch 7.30 pm**

**Thursday 5 June 2008**

It gives me great pleasure to address you tonight at the first Hillary Institute Dinner.

Seventeen months ago I was with Sir Edmund Hillary in Antarctica celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Scott Base. Sir Ed took enormous pleasure from that last trip to Antarctica. Over those few days his enthusiasm and generosity of spirit touched everyone present. It was an unforgettable experience for all of us there, and reinforced for us all what an extraordinary human being he was.

During those celebrations at Scott Base I made the public announcement on behalf of the Institute of its establishment. I said that the purpose of the Institute would be to foster and recognise a new generation of leaders following Sir Edmund's example of working to make the world a better place.

Sir Ed was a New Zealander to the core. He was a humanitarian, who year after year went back to Nepal to help the people who helped him. He had a strong commitment to good causes, especially those engaged with young people, outdoor recreation, and the environment.

The work planned by this institute will be a fitting tribute to Sir Edmund's extraordinary life and achievements. It can play a role in debating and shaping solutions to major issues facing the global community.

It can do that by recognising, rewarding, and supporting emerging leaders, who, with a little help, can make major contributions to solving the problems our world faces.

Emerging leaders often face obstacles, particularly when the ideas or issues they are promoting are new, or require major changes in existing behaviour.

These obstacles can include a lack of time to devote to the cause, a lack of resources or investment, isolation from others of like mind, and the lack of a global stage.

Recognition by this Institute can help clear away those obstacles. By providing the resources and platform for inspirational and innovative mid-career leaders to develop, the Institute can promote action on and help change thinking about the challenges which face us.

If anyone doubts the power of ideas one need only reflect on how quickly public opinion has shifted on the issue of climate change - the focus of the Institute's first international programme of work, and of this afternoon's symposium.

As recently as the late 1990s, the issue was barely on the public's radar, although international negotiations had been ongoing for some time.

When my government moved to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2002, it is probably fair to say that we were somewhat ahead of public opinion. All I can say is that I'm glad we didn't let that hold us back. We have had the opportunity to get ahead of the issue before it could hit our economy in damaging ways.

It was a similar story internationally. It was without a great deal of optimism that we sent our officials to APEC to argue for references to climate change to be included in its 2006 Leaders' communique. But a year later, at the 2007 APEC meeting in Sydney, climate change preoccupied leaders at the meeting.

The fact that climate change has become a significant concern in global and domestic politics, in business, and in our communities, demonstrates the power that leadership and advocacy backed by good science and information can have on how we think and act.

Let us acknowledge the role of Al Gore whose advocacy through the release of *An Inconvenient Truth* brought the issue to the attention of millions around the world.

Then there was Sir Nicholas Stern's report on the Economics of Climate Change commissioned by the British Government. This report clarified our understanding of the economic costs of climate change, and brought home the reality that the cost of doing nothing was greater than the cost of taking action.

As well there have been the ongoing reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, led by Dr Pachauri, which made the scientific case for action that could not be ignored.

All these leaders have made a real difference to the shape and urgency of the public debate. They have helped us move on from debating whether climate change is a problem or not, to looking at how we respond and adapt to the challenges it poses.

Given the critical importance of this issue, it is appropriate that the Institute has chosen as its first focus area leadership on solutions for climate change.

Finding solutions is now a central task for government, business, and the wider community. Our government has made achieving greater sustainability central to our vision for New Zealand.

Looked at on a global level the climate change and sustainability challenges look immense. But if we break them down into what individuals, households, communities, businesses and industry sectors, and governments and countries can do, solutions can be found.

Solutions need to be comprehensive, with each of us challenged as to how we can, by our own actions, make a difference.

For me, sustainability has economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions.

A sustainable economy cannot be built on plundering the natural environment for short term gain - nor on a society where many are left to fail.

Sustainable societies are built on investment in knowledge, skills, and technology, which are also critical ingredients to 21st century economic success.

Sustainable societies balance opportunity with security, and they balance the needs of present generations with those of the future. And sustainable nations have the resources to plan for and care for their natural environment.

Such nations build sustainability into their value systems - it becomes a guiding principle for decision makers at all levels of society, from policy makers in central and local government to each of us in our organisations, businesses, workplaces and homes.

When each of us begins to think this way, our nations are truly on the way to making a difference for the better for our planet.

I have issued the challenge that New Zealand aspire to be a truly sustainable nation, and to be carbon neutral.

I am convinced that moving in that direction is not only right for the planet, but also is essential to our future prosperity. New Zealand is the most geographically remote first world nation. With the exception of our relatively near neighbour Australia, the world's affluent markets are a long way away from us.

In a carbon constrained world where, increasingly, first world consumers are making decisions about the environmental integrity of the products and services they buy, we have to go the extra mile for sustainability.

Our nation's clean and green brand is a priceless asset - but it has to be more than a slogan.

So if we are to continue to persuade people thousands of miles away to buy our goods or travel to our country, we have to be able to assure them that we care about carbon footprints too, and are doing everything in our power to address the issues.

It's important to front foot this issue - to take leadership of it as New Zealand has done on so many other issues in our short history from votes for women, to the introduction of social security, and becoming nuclear free.

So rather than shy away from the climate change challenge - we must meet it head on. That's why our government has developed comprehensive strategies and policies ranging from the Emissions Trading Scheme to the Energy and Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategies; from permanent forest sinks to the introduction of a biofuels sales obligation; from investment in household and business energy efficiency programmes and a rewrite of the Building Code, to increased funding for research into reducing agricultural emissions. The New Zealand Transport Strategy is being updated to bring sustainability to the fore too.

To the small atoll nations of the South Pacific which would not survive rising sea levels, to other nations threatened by desertification or by more frequent and devastating cyclones, it matters not whether the greenhouse gas emissions come from the developed or the developing world - they just want action, from all of us.

Today's symposium and dinner are taking place on World Environment Day. This year, New Zealand is privileged to be the host country for this day for the whole world.

We haven't been chosen to host because we are perfect - clearly we have work to do. But we can be credible hosts because of our commitment to tackling the big issues and getting on with the job.

The symposium and dinner today are also an important milestone in the Hillary Institute's mission to find and support great leadership which changes the world for the better. By supporting such leaders, the Institute will help expand the boundaries of what can be achieved.

Before Sir Ed and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit of Everest, there were some who doubted it was even possible for human beings to reach such heights. Sir Ed and Tenzing demonstrated it was possible, and by doing so inspired us all.

Sir Ed was a man of great energy, great courage and great dreams. He overcame many challenges in his life, and helped many others to achieve their own dreams - as a role model and mentor, and through his work on the Himalayan Trust and support for many other causes.

His legacy will live on in many ways including through the work of the Hillary Institute. I thank those who have led and funded its establishment, and wish you well for your work in the years ahead.

**ENDS**