



media release

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Otago appoints Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies

Internationally renowned academic Professor Kevin Clements has been appointed to the new Chair in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Otago.

Professor Clements also becomes Director of the National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, to be based in the University's Division of Humanities. The Centre will be dedicated to reflection on the nature of conflict, its resolution and the creation of peaceful environments. It will bring together academics, students and visitors from a wide range of disciplines, with one of its key aims being the full and effective involvement of indigenous peoples.

The Centre and Chair have been made possible by a \$1.25m donation from the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust. The Trust's gift was made through the University's Leading Thinkers Initiative and was therefore matched by the Government under the Partnerships for Excellence scheme – lifting the total to \$2.5m.

Professor Clements originates from New Zealand – graduating with a PhD in Sociology from Victoria University in 1970 – but has spent the past 17 years in international posts. He is currently the Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies and Foundation Director of the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland. Through his directorship, the Centre has developed into an established academic unit of 18 faculty and staff, plus 26 associated researchers. It has a strong postgraduate programme and a track record of input to relevant national and international projects. From 1999 to 2003, Professor Clements was Secretary General of International Alert – an international non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in London, working on conflict and conflict transformation in Africa, Eurasia, Asia and Colombia. He was Director of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in Virginia from 1994 to 1999. He is also the incoming Secretary General of the International Peace Research Association.

Professor Clements says he is looking forward to bringing together the experience of both his academic and NGO positions of the past 20 years.

“Most recently – at the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies – I have gained vital knowledge in building an effective teaching, research and practice programme, focused on conflicts within Australia and in the surrounding region. The

Otago Chair seemed a logical extension of all the work I have done previously. I have long advocated such a centre for New Zealand and I am humbled and privileged to be given the chance to develop it.

“I want the New Zealand Centre to be a centre of academic excellence, generating the highest quality peace and conflict research, theory and practice nationally and internationally. I also want to build on the rich indigenous peace-building initiatives that run deep in New Zealand’s Moriori and Maori traditions and want to make sure this Centre plays its role in enhancing positive biculturalism within New Zealand – a unique feature, which is missing from many similar centres around the world.”

Professor Clements’ primary research interest is in the development and peace-building nexus: creating the right structural conditions that remove the sources of direct and indirect violence. His recent research has focused on the inability of post-colonial state systems to generate conditions within which they can guarantee the security and safety of their citizens. He also has a wider interest in how individuals and groups can enlarge their empathetic awareness and ‘boundaries of compassion’.

“I am looking forward to working with colleagues across the University – including Political Studies, History, Economics, Religious Studies, Communications and Health Sciences – the Trust, the Tangata Whenua and peace constituencies.”

University Vice-Chancellor Professor David Skegg says the appointment is significant from an academic perspective, but is also particularly relevant to one of Otago’s stated strategic imperatives: to contribute to the national good and to international progress.

“In our statement of priorities, we specifically refer to the demographic, social and economic changes transforming New Zealand and the role research will play in steering this change. Professor Clements has outstanding experience and ability, so the Centre he leads will quickly become a hub of research and teaching. It will also be actively engaged in peace-making initiatives in New Zealand, the Pacific, and wider afield.”

Aotearoa New Zealand Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies Trust member Maui Solomon says the Trust is looking forward to working with Professor Clements.

“It is hoped that this new Centre will help inspire a new generation of peace-makers and peace-keepers and promote the use of conflict resolution through peaceful means rather than violence. The Centre will give new impetus to the well-recognised contribution that New Zealanders are making for a more peaceful world. It will also be a world leader in its active partnership and collaboration with indigenous peoples and their traditions of peace-making.”

Professor Clements takes up his position in January 2009.

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Additional Notes

The National Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies

The Centre will be based at the Dunedin campus, but be national in its focus, with a significant presence in Auckland and possibly Wellington. In addition to Professor Clements, it will be home to several associates drawn from academic departments and an international advisory board made up of experts in the field. The Centre will work to enhance individual and collective capacities to understand and manage disputes, work against violence, and build sustainable peace at local, national and international levels. It will provide advanced-level short courses and training for government and non-government organisations engaged in peace-keeping, peace-building, development activities, humanitarian intervention and work in conflict situations.

The Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Centre Trust

The Trust is the vision of four prominent New Zealanders: retired University of Auckland senior lecturer in English and ESOL teacher trainer Dorothy Brown; active Anglican Church member and retired businessman Chris Barfoot; former dean of law at the University of Waikato and Human Rights Commissioner Professor Margaret Bedggood; and prominent Moriori advocate and lawyer Maui Solomon. These individuals recognised a common vision and formed the Trust in 2005. At around the same time, the Trust began working with the Hokotehi Moriori Trust, which had a vision of establishing a Centre for Peace Studies on Rekohu (Chatham Islands), based around their ancestors' 500-year covenant of peace. It has a network of 900 people interested in the Trust and Centre, and continues to actively fundraise in support of the Centre.