



Peace Movement Aotearoa

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Contribution to 'Burn this CD: Responses to October 15'

What happened on the 15th October and since was really surreal, that's the only word I can think of to describe it. When the news started coming in and the images of what was done at Ruatoki, I just couldn't believe that such a thing was happening yet again to a Maori community, and this time in the twenty first century ... the people of Ruatoki in particular must have felt like they'd woken up in a war zone that morning.

My first thought was that this was a form of collective punishment - that's when a group or community is punished for the actions - or alleged actions in this case - of one or two individuals. Collective punishment is prohibited in international law, through the Geneva Conventions and so on which are generally applicable in times of war or armed conflict - but the concept of collective punishment can be applied in other situations as well, and it is simply unacceptable at any time.

These whole so-called anti-terrorism raids have involved so many human rights violations it's difficult to know where to start. Just in terms of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and that's just one of the international human rights instruments the government has ratified, the raids and the associated goings on breached at least six articles of that one Covenant.

Thinking about this over the past few weeks, the human rights violations can be seen as affecting four main groups of people.

Firstly there were the people affected by the actions of police, Armed Offender Squad and Special Tactics Group officers in the Ruatoki Valley - the blockading of a Maori community by armed and masked officers, the targeting with laser gun sights, the separation of children from their parents, the illegal detention, the photographing of children and adults who were not under arrest nor subsequently charged with anything, and the search of homes and seizure of property belonging to people who were not under arrest nor subsequently charged with any offence.

And of course the searches and the seizure of property belonging to people who were not under arrest happened in different parts of the country, so that would be the second group of people affected.

Then the third group are those who were arrested, the reported denial of due process to those individuals - like not being told why bail was being denied, the difficulty they had with

access to their lawyers and so on. Then there's the issue of the comments by police officers and politicians, including the Prime Minister, who have referred to the existence of terrorist camps and made other assertions as though they were facts rather than matters yet to be proved or disproved in a court.

Then the fourth group whose human rights have been violated is a huge group, that includes everyone - whether it's colleagues, or family or friends - who had any contact with the people who were arrested, or anyone who had any contact with those people and so on during the 18 month surveillance period. Their names and telephone numbers and home addresses and so on are all now included in a file somewhere - and there's no way of knowing how that might affect all those people in the future, having their details associated with a so-called terrorist investigation.

And one of the very clear things that can be seen, particularly at Ruatoki and the raids on other homes, was the different treatment of Maori and non-Maori individuals and families and communities, so there's a whole layer of racial discrimination there which is itself another breach of human rights.

You know government politicians and others have justified the terrorism suppression legislation by saying it's needed to give effect to their obligations as a United Nations member state - but that's only part of the story. All of the UN resolutions, the statements and reports from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN human rights monitoring bodies, the Special Rapporteurs and so on and so forth - they all stress that governments, in any counter-terrorism activities, must not perpetrate violations of human rights themselves.

Yet all around the world, especially since the 11 September attacks in the United States, governments have used the word "terrorism" as a label to justify human rights violations and violent repression against individuals and communities, it's like the latest excuse for governments to do what they want and to ignore basic human rights. Because of course there's a history of this going back over centuries.

And now we've seen it happen here in Aotearoa - it really is completely unacceptable. Whatever those people who have been arrested may or may not have been planning on doing, that does not justify what has happened here over the past six weeks - there really is no excuse for invading a community, or people's homes, or terrorising children. There can't be any excuse for what's happened; it's simply inexcusable, under any circumstances.

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