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## Māori activist on New Caledonia: ‘Human rights should not be subject to referendums’

17 hours ago • By [Te Aniwaniwa Paterson](#)



Kia Mau has called on France to de-militarise and end the colonial occupation of Kanaky.

Indigenous rights kaupapa *Kia Mau* has called on France to de-militarise and end the colonial occupation of Kanaky/New Caledonia given the last week of civil unrest on the Pacific island.

The group said it stood in solidarity with Kanak people seeking independence from France.

Foreign Minister Winston Peters has also called for peaceful de-escalation. “No matter your views on the political arrangements in New Caledonia, everyone should agree that violence is harmful to every community there,” he said .

The country was known as Kanaky until 1774 when it was renamed New Caledonia by Captain James Cook.

“If you look at the records you’ll see it was just not too long after [Cook] set sights upon Kanaky that this very dark history began of European interruption in their spaces and European invasion and European oppression in Kanaky spaces and this includes blackbirding, which is slavery,” said Tina Ngata of Kia Mau who, along with activist Sina Brown-Davis released a solidarity statement.

“We’ve been watching with increasing concern for some time, as the French have continued and the French government have continued to undermine the process for decolonisation in Kanaky and that’s something that we also kind of identify with is that you have these moves that are hard fought for, people have lived and died in pursuit of self-determination,” Ngata (Ngāti Porou), told *Te Ao Māori News*.

Unrest broke out last Monday in Kanaky after France proposed it would give voting rights in local elections to French residents who have lived in Kanaky for 10 years. Pro-independence Kanak leaders believe this will dilute the Indigenous voters who make up 40% of the population.

The riots have led to the deaths of six people - including three Indigenous Kanak and two French paramilitary gendarmes. Yesterday French forces launched a major operation of more than 600 French premilitary gendarmes to gain control of a 60km road linking the capital Nouméa to the main international airport.

About 200 New Zealanders are believed to be stranded there, waiting for the airport to be reopened.

French colonisation of Kanaky started in 1853 where the territory was annexed under Napoleon III. Land was seized, French forces asserted control and turned Kanaky into a penal colony. The Kanak population was decimated by European disease and the Kanaky people were excluded from the economy and confined to reservations - unable to leave without permission. In 1864 nickel mining began which led to pollution and devastated forests, wetlands, and waterways. Kanaky people were marginalised on their land.

## **1998 Nouméa accord**

In 1998 the Nouméa accord was signed, with the promise of a gradual transfer of power back to Indigenous Kanaks and involved three referendums to vote on independence.

Ngata rejects the very notion of the referendum and said the rights of Kanak should be default.

The first referendum for independence received a yes vote of 72 per cent in 1998, 43 per cent in 2018, and 47 per cent in 2020. There were concerns about the 2020 referendum as the overwhelming majority of Kanak people didn't participate because the referendum was held during a Covid-19 lockdown. This made voting inaccessible and Kanak weren't able to participate because of their Indigenous practices around mourning.

BBC reported that since the 1998 Nouméa accord, more than 40,000 French nationals have moved to Kanaky and thus the proposal to give voting rights to French residents of ten years includes tens of thousands of the French nationals who are likely to vote against the independence referendum.

The Kia Mau statement also urged the halt of French immigration that undermines the social, political and economic agency of the Kanak people. Ngata said that the French government was undermining the decolonisation process through importing ex-military personnel.

“The French government has financially incentivised military personnel to retire in Nouméa ... these are military people, these are police people who have been financially incentivised, who are more often than not, far-right people who are now getting voting rights and that is a clear, that can undermine the Nouméa accord referendums,” Ngata alleged.

Ngata is referring to the Indemnité temporaire de retraite (ITR) scheme which were civil and military pensions introduced in 1952 to encourage retirement in overseas territories. French civil servants, including military were awarded pensions 75 per cent higher than they'd have received in France. In 2008 it was agreed the scheme be withdrawn and the pension supplement was phased out over 10 years.

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***Self determination is a human right and human rights should not be subject to referendums.***

— Tina Ngata

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In 1960, Resolution 1514 was adopted by the UN General Assembly. This was a declaration on decolonisation, deeming all people had the right to self-determination and proclaimed the necessity of bringing colonialism in all its forms to an end. Kanak have long sought their right for independence, and believed the Nouméa accord would be a pathway to decolonisation and sovereignty.

“The UN has supported that and have said decolonisation is a moral obligation and so you know the fact that one, it’s taken so long but two, that France is now back-tracking and regressing that process and undermining that process really speaks to I think, first of all the moral bankruptcy of the French state in the first instance but also it speaks concerningly to the inability of mechanisms like the UN to be able to secure the things it’s meant to do,” Ngata said.

## **Criticism of Kanak resistance**

“There’s a concerning trend in the media, not just in relation to Kanaky but we see it in relation to Palestine, we see it in relation in Sudan, all around the world which is where European colonialism is erased as the violent backdrop to political uprisings. So we see obviously Israel and within mainstream media, particularly US-centred media that they frame Palestinian resistance as being unprovoked violence, and of course that completely erases the decades and decades of European colonial oppression in that space. Similarly in Kanaky, there is a tendency to frame this as violence and even just calls that really centre on Kanak and in particular Kanak youth to be calm, retain peace as if they are the instigators but all of this is happening upon a backdrop of French oppression,” Ngata said.

Ngata said Kanak resistance had to be seen in the context of the violent French colonisation and the continual undermining of the decolonisation process by the French state.

“These are the kinds of things that will inevitably lead to resistance. It’s our human nature to reach for justice, it’s our human nature to reach for survival and, ultimately, colonialism threatens Indigenous survival - that’s its very point, that’s its very purpose,” Ngata said,

“So people will continue to reach for justice in the face of colonial oppression and France has repeatedly been warned that continuing on down the track and continuing to regress away from their commitments to transfer power would lead to an uprising but they have consistently ignored that. So to a degree, well I’d say to the utmost degree, France is responsible for the situation that we see playing out right now.”





## Solidarity statement for Kanaky

As Indigenous peoples of New Zealand and Te Moananui a Kiwa, we watch with grave concern the recent events in Kanaky / New Caledonia.

We have witnessed the Macron government derail the process for decolonization and usurp the Noumea Accords. We wholeheartedly reaffirm and support the inalienable Kanak right to self-determination, enshrined in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In particular, we reaffirm the Indigenous Kanak people's right to self-determination and political independence from France.

For over 300 years, Te Moananui a Kiwa has been subjected to European colonialism, the criminality of which is obscured and hidden by Western presumptions of righteousness and legitimacy. This is mirrored by colonial actions in Palestine, as indeed they are wherever colonialism endures. We note with concern that mainstream media continues to frame stands for Indigenous justice as unprovoked violence, erasing the backdrop of violent colonialism upon which such stands take place. Ultimately, justice and peace can only exist in the absence of colonialism, which continues to accelerate and intensify across Te Moananui a Kiwa.



## Déclaration de soutien à Kanaky

En tant que peuples autochtones de Nouvelle-Zélande et Te Moananui a Kiwa, nous observons les récents évènements en Kanaky/Nouvelle-Calédonie avec beaucoup d'inquiétude.

Nous sommes témoins du fait que le gouvernement Macron entrave le processus de décolonisation et usurpe l'Accord de Nouméa. Nous réaffirons et soutenons de tout cœur le droit inaliénable des Kanak à l'auto-détermination, inscrit dans la Déclaration des Nations Unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones. Plus particulièrement, nous réaffirons le droit du peuple kanak à l'auto-détermination et à l'indépendance politique.

Pendant plus de 300 ans, Te Moananui a Kiwa a été soumis au colonialisme européen, dont la criminalité est cachée et voilée par les présomptions de bien-pensance et légitimité occidentales. Cela se reflète dans les actions coloniales en Palestine, car elles se retrouvent dans tous les contextes où le colonialisme persiste. C'est avec inquiétude que nous remarquons que les médias continuent de présenter la défense pour la justice autochtone comme de la violence non-provoquée, effaçant le violent contexte de colonialisme sur lequel cette défense se base. En définitive, la justice et la paix ne peuvent qu'exister en l'absence du colonialisme, qui cependant continue de s'accélérer et de s'intensifier à travers Te Moananui a Kiwa.



The devastating effects of nuclearism, militarism, extraction and economic globalisation on Indigenous culture and fragile ecosystems in the Pacific are an extension of that colonialism and must be halted. The economic and political destabilisation in Kanaky did not start with the uprising of Kanak people, it started with the illegal annexation of Kanaky soils and waters by France. Violence did not start with the uprising of Kanak people, it started with the colonial crimes against humanity by European invaders, which include enslavement, child theft, land dispossession, and the enduring crime of illegal annexation. In such contexts, an uprising constitutes the inherent right of Kanak peoples to reach for justice, hitherto denied upon their own lands.

The New Zealand government has a moral obligation to support Kanak rights in this space, derived from its historical colonial actions in Kanaky and the broader Moananui a Kiwa region. This complicity has seen New Zealand prioritise its colonial commonalities with Europe, Britain, Canada, USA, and Australia, over and above its commonalities as Moana nations, and sites of colonial injustice.

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Les effets dévastateurs du nucléaire, du militarisme, de l'extractivisme et de la mondialisation économique sur la culture et les écosystèmes fragiles autochtones dans le Pacifique sont une extension de ce colonialisme qui doit être stoppé. La déstabilisation économique et politique en Kanaky n'a pas commencé avec le soulèvement du peuple kanak, elle a commencé avec l'annexion illégale des terres et eaux kanak par la France. La violence n'a pas commencé avec le soulèvement du peuple kanak, elle a commencé avec les crimes contre l'humanité coloniaux perpétrés par les envahisseurs européens, qui inclut la mise en esclavage, le vol d'enfants, la dépossession des terres et le crime d'annexion illégale qui continue dans la durée. Dans ce contexte, un soulèvement constitue le droit inhérent du peuple Kanak à aboutir à la justice, qui lui est niée sur ses propres terres.

Le gouvernement néo-zélandais a une obligation morale à soutenir les droits kanak dans cet espace, liée à ses actes coloniaux historiques en Kanaky et dans la région Moananui a Kiwa. Cette complicité a vu la Nouvelle-Zélande prioriser les intérêts coloniaux avec l'Europe, la Grande Bretagne, le Canada, les États Unis, et l'Australie, aux dépens des intérêts des nations du Moana, et d'endroits où règne l'injustice coloniale.

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We stand in solidarity with our Kanak whānau as Moana peoples, and as Indigenous peoples, in opposing the pervasive imposition of European colonialism upon our worlds, and urge the following:

- Halting the influx of French immigrants which continues to undermine the political social and economic agency of the Kanak people on their own lands
- The deployment of a Pan-Pacific independent mission to monitor the transfer of political power to the Kanak people
- Consultation with all relevant parties to ensure that the decolonization process leads to a valid active self-determination by the Kanak people, and provide for them to define and participate in their own economic social and cultural development
- De-escalation of the militarised French response to Kanak dissent and an end to the state of emergency
- Revocation of Pacific Islands Forum Dialogue Partner status for France, which was initially revoked due to the resumption of nuclear testing on Mururoa in the late 1990s and was only reinstated after halting the tests

We stand ready to further express our solidarity with our Kanak peoples, and to hold our own government to account alongside their colonial allies for the harms of colonialism upon Te Moananui a Kiwa, and upon Kanaky.



Nous sommes en solidarité avec notre whānau kanak en tant que peuples Moana et peuples autochtones, dans le refus de l'imposition omniprésente du colonialisme européen dans nos mondes, et nous exigeons :

- De mettre fin à l'influx d'immigrants français qui continue d'affecter la liberté politique, sociale et économique du peuple kanak sur ses propres terres
- Le déploiement d'une délégation pan-Pacifique afin de contrôler le transfert de pouvoir politique au peuple kanak
- Une consultation avec toutes les parties prenantes pour assurer que le processus de décolonisation mène à une auto-détermination valide et active du peuple kanak, et lui permette de définir et participer à son propre développement économique, social et culturel
- Le désamorçage de la réponse militarisée de la France à la contestation kanak et la fin de l'état d'urgence
- La révocation du statut de Partenaires du Dialogue Post-Forum de la France au Forum des îles du Pacifique, qui avait été initialement suspendu lors de la reprise des essais nucléaires à Mururoa à la fin des années 1990 et a été réintégré après l'arrêt des tests

Nous nous tenons prêts à démontrer notre solidarité avec notre peuple kanak, et tenir notre propre gouvernement pour responsable ainsi que ses alliés coloniaux pour les préjudices du colonialisme sur Te Moananui a Kiwa, et sur Kanaky.