



**JUDICIAL OFFICE FOR SENIOR COURTS
Te Tari Kaiwhakawā mo ngā Kōti Mātāmua**

**MEDIA STATEMENT
PĀNUI PĀPĀHO**

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‘Our Courts’ a new video

To reflect New Zealand’s bicultural heritage and increasing diversity the judiciary has, for the first time, produced a multi-lingual video explaining the role of the Courts and the key principles on which New Zealand’s legal system is based.

The nine-minute video, narrated in English, te reo Māori and Mandarin, features the new Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann and the country’s first Māori Supreme Court Judge, Justice Joe Williams alongside Judges of the Court of Appeal, High Court and District Court.

Since her appointment as head of the judiciary Justice Winkelmann has emphasised the importance of making the courts and the law itself more accessible, and better understood, by all New Zealanders.

One of the important concepts explained in the video is judicial independence and the position of the Courts as the third branch of government:

“The independence of our judiciary is constitutionally important in New Zealand, but it is not well understood. It is essential for the judiciary to be independent to fulfil the role of checking the exercise of public power and upholding the rule of law.”

Chief Justice Helen Winkelmann.

Explaining why judicial independence is so vital to the rule of law, Wellington High Court Judge, Justice Susan Thomas says:

“Every judge in New Zealand takes an oath of judicial independence. This means that they promise they will not be influenced by anyone and will decide cases impartially, not showing favouritism to any person, not being affected by sympathy or prejudice and not being influenced by a desire for popularity or fear of being criticised. It means that a judge must focus only on the facts and the law, put all the other matters to one side, making decisions in the interests of justice.”

The video also explains the four-tier structure of our court system and the core principles underpinning our system of criminal justice: the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial, and openness and transparency.

“How we treat a person charged with a crime is a reflection of the values we hold as a society” says Justice Thomas.

The video can be viewed on the courts website www.courtsofnz.govt.nz and will be available to watch in courthouses with public screens.

Currently available in three languages, it is intended that the video will also be produced in other languages.

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