

Allen Chang

Contributed by Lachlan
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On February 12, 2002 the Prime Minister Rt Hon Helen Clark and the Hon George Hawkins Minister for Ethnic Affairs hosted a function at Parliament to celebrate Chinese New Year.

At this function the Prime Minister said:

"I wish to announce today that the Government has decided to make a formal apology to those Chinese people who paid the poll tax and suffered other discrimination imposed by statute and to their descendants." Today we also express our sorrow and regret that such practices were once considered appropriate. While the Governments which passed these laws acted in a manner which was lawful at the time, their actions are seen by us today as unacceptable. We believe this act of reconciliation is required to ensure that full closure can be reached on this chapter in our nation's history. The Government's apology today is the formal beginning to a process of reconciliation. The Minister for Ethnic Affairs and I have been authorised to pursue with representatives of the families of the early settlers a form of reconciliation which would be appropriate to and of benefit to the Chinese community. To this end we wish to meet with key representatives of the descendants to discuss the next step in this process of reconciliation." Professor Goh President of the New Zealand Chinese Association, Esther Fung President of the Wellington Branch of the New Zealand Chinese Association and Allen Chang President of the Tung Jung Association of NZ Inc representing the Tung Jung Association, the Seyip Association of NZ, the Wellington Chinese Sports and Cultural Centre and the Chinese Dragons Sports and Social club, responded to the Prime Minister and Minister for Ethnic Affairs.

Allen Chang's speech follows:

Rt Hon Helen Clark Prime Minister
Hon George Hawkins Minister for Ethnic Affairs
Mr Speaker
Distinguished Guests

The Government is today formally acknowledging that the injustices incurred by the early Chinese settlers, including the payment of the poll tax, were wrong. This Government is also saying that the actions taken by the Labour Government in 1944 in abolishing the payment of the poll tax did not go far enough in admitting the unjust practices against the early Chinese settlers. Today marks the start of Chinese New Year, the year of the horse. I applaud the Prime Minister's announcement tonight. This signals a start to righting the wrongs of the past. We will see the beginning of a greater understanding to ensure that such injustices do not occur again. It is significant, Prime Minister that you should choose to make such an important and historic announcement on this day. As a descendant of one of the early settlers and a third generation New Zealand Chinese I am proud of being both Chinese and a New Zealander. I am very proud of what our ancestors achieved. We owe our successes to them for all of their hard work, traditions and encouragement. I am pleased that all Chinese in New Zealand, whether they are recent arrivals or whose families came to New Zealand many years ago, will continue to enjoy the rights of citizenship that today signals and that successive generations of Chinese will continue to grow up in a just and non discriminatory society in New Zealand. Thank you for agreeing to meet with representatives of the descendants of the early Chinese settlers so that they can describe to you some of the hardships that were experienced in the early days. This is very important to us and we look forward to working with you. Prime Minister, as the President of the Tung Jung Association of New Zealand and on behalf of the Seyip Association of New Zealand, the Wellington Chinese Sports and Cultural Centre and the Chinese Dragons Sports and Social Club, all formed by the early Chinese settlers and their descendants, we congratulate you on your courage in taking this step. While it is hard to forget the past, we want to focus on the future and ensure that the promises you are making to our children today will become a reality. It is time to set aside these wrongs and work co-operatively to build a better future for our community. Thank you.
Allen Chang
President
Tung Jung Association of New Zealand Inc