

MAVIS AIREY talks to a Maori activist whose involvement in community and international issues is based on personal commitment.

Committed to peace

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Hilda Halkyard-Harawira—with one of her five children, five-year-old daughter, Ruiha Aloha Aina, at home in Kaitiāia

Corso colleagues insist the words "for personal courage" are mentioned somewhere in the Danish Peace Foundation's award to their Maori organiser, but Hilda Halkyard-Harawira refuses to read out the "big-headed" bits. She will admit only that it was the recognition of "untiring commitment to the struggle against the complex of nuclearism, militarism, racism, and sexism in the Pacific."

"I didn't feel the prize was awarded to me," she insists. "I wanted to receive it on behalf of many struggling groups in Aotearoa and the Pacific. There are thousands of people working for a nuclear-free and independent Pacific, and I felt to pick out one person is wrong."

So when she went to Denmark at the end of May to collect the award it was together with a Pacific Peoples Anti-Nuclear Action Committee (P.P.A.N.A.C.) worker, Philomena Waharoa, and Helen Clark, who had also been awarded a prize for her "eminent contribution to New Zealand's determined and democratic responsible nuclear-free policy."

This is the second year the foundation has made a peace award. Hilda Halkyard-Harawira believes they wanted this year to draw European attention to work in the Pacific at both Parliamentary and grass-roots levels.

She made her view of Europe clear in a film she

took part in made by two Swedes, called "A Moment of Oblivion," which also features Helen Clark and the Primé Minister, Mr Lange.

"Europe does not offer us anything positive to look forward to; instead, only a nuclear future. It is not a Polynesian with a finger on the button."

She also met a lot of peace organisations, church people, and indigenous groups and visited the Danish Ministry of Disarmament.

Now home in Kaitiāia with her five children, and a sixth expected in December, she is back at work in the Corso office where her job as Maori organiser involves developing the Aotearoa programme in conjunction with the Maori network all over the country.

Corso raises \$25,000 to \$40,000 a year by direct appeal and its annual appeal, held today, is specifically for the Aotearoa Fund, which is quite separate from its overseas work.

The project started two years ago in recognition that there are similar problems here to those in some of the projects Corso supports overseas, Hilda Halkyard-Harawira says.

She cites sub-standard housing, lack of basic living standards, land issues and self determination for indigenous people.

A national, tribally representative committee decides how the money should be spent.

"At the moment the focus is on small rural

development — people who will never receive other funding. They may be people who have decided to go back to the land and have no basic amenities, such as roads, power, water, or building materials."

The programme has also funded the Ngatai Paoa submission to the Waitangi Tribunal, and given assistance not covered by government agencies to families whose houses were washed away in last year's freak floods in Whanape and Pawarenga.

A newsletter, "Manu Korero," gives a far north perspective on issues such as corporatisation, and the office also deals with requests from prisons for Maori articles and magazines. Some people drop in wanting legal advice, or to seek funding advice for groups.

Hilda Halkyard-Harawira is also on a committee overseeing police harassment.

"There is a lot of unemployment here, a lot of people on low incomes, so there tends to be a lot of community problems and I suppose we are like the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. But we do put forward our views, and challenge institutions. Sometimes we are able to get through to them."

At present she is working on the Justice Department.

"Anyone with P.D. (periodic detention) has to go down to Kawakawa, so we are trying to get something set up here so

there is less stress on families."

She has also been working on offering alternatives to young people — "they haven't dropped out of the system, the system has dropped them out" — with courses for young Maori men and women on taha Maori, language, culture, and confidence: "Things they haven't had the chance to learn before."

A lot of young people, she finds, are dissatisfied with the city, and are going back to their roots in the rural areas.

Now 32, she has been involved in Maori politics since she was 16, and was for a time a teacher. "Then I realised being a Maori was not enough. In reality a lot of schools are designed to fail a large percentage of people."

She left teaching and got involved in Kohanga Reo, which she now sees as an alternative education system with useful applications in later life.

"We have a lot of problems and we know best how to solve them. We have to do what we can with limited resources rather than wait around for some pakeha to do it for us."

She got involved with Corso four years ago — "A lot of the issues they support are consistent with what I feel" — and started working full-time for them when the Aotearoa programme began.

"I was doing this sort of work voluntarily for years before. The only difference is now I get paid."