

The Right Honourable Helen Elizabeth Clark ONZ

The honorary degree of Doctor of Laws was conferred upon Helen Clark by the Chancellor, Ms Belinda Hutchinson AM at a Faculty of Law graduation at 11.30am on 8 December 2017.

Citation

Chancellor, it gives me great pleasure to present The Right Honourable Helen Elizabeth Clark ONZ to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (honoris causa).

Helen graduated from the University of Auckland with a Bachelor of Arts and then a Masters of Arts with first class honours, in the field of political studies. Prior to beginning her career in politics, Helen was a lecturer in the Department of Political Studies at the University of Auckland.

Helen was first elected to the New Zealand House of Representatives in 1981. Throughout her parliamentary career, she promoted inclusive social and economic policy, diversity initiatives, environmental sustainability and nuclear disarmament. Upon re-election in 1984, Helen became Chair of the Select Committee on Disarmament and Arms Control and of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. She played a significant role in developing New Zealand's nuclear-free policies during this time.

In her third term in Parliament, Helen became a cabinet minister in the Fourth Labour Government of New Zealand. After holding several cabinet positions, in 1989 she became the first female Deputy Prime Minister. In 1990, she was appointed to the Privy Council.

In 1999, Helen became the first woman to become Prime Minister of New Zealand following a general election. She remained in that office until 2008, and was New Zealand's fifth longest-serving Prime Minister.

Helen's government was known for promoting inclusive economic and social development. In its first three weeks in office, it passed legislation to increase taxation for high-income earners following a campaign pledge to do so to fund basic services better. Her government increased the minimum wage annually and significantly, reversed deregulation of the accident compensation scheme, strengthened collective bargaining, removed interest payments on student loans, established a sovereign wealth fund to support New Zealand Superannuation, and established the KiwiSaver contributory savings scheme. It legislated for paid parental leave and extended annual holidays, and funded twenty hours free early childhood education for all three and four-year olds. It significantly improved the affordability of primary health care.

In 2000, the Clark Government introduced a Housing Restructuring Amendment Bill, which allowed for rents in public housing to be capped at 25 per cent of household income. That ensured the affordability of public housing for those on low incomes. Similarly, in 2004, the Labour Government introduced the Working for Families cash transfer scheme for low- and low-middle income families which is credited with reducing child poverty rates and income inequality overall.

Helen's first ministry set a precedent for diversity, including eleven women, four Maori, and the first Pacific Island minister. During her Prime Ministership, a number of women held other important offices in New Zealand, including the posts of Governor General, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Chief Justice. Helen herself, as Prime Minister, was a member of the Council of Women World Leaders, a global grouping of current and former female prime ministers and presidents which advocates for gender equality across societies.

Helen advocated strongly for New Zealand's comprehensive programme on sustainability and for tackling climate change. Her objective was to establish New Zealand as being among the world's leading nations in dealing with these global challenges.

In 2009, after retiring from her Parliamentary career, Helen became the first woman to be appointed to the position of Administrator of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The UNDP works in more than 170 countries worldwide, with the aims of eradicating poverty and reducing exclusion and inequality in the context of sustainable development.

During her eminent career, Helen has received numerous awards, including the Order of New Zealand, the Star of the Solomon Islands from the Solomon Islands government in recognition of New

Zealand's role in restoring law and order in the Solomon Islands, top honours from a range of other countries, the Peace Prize from the Danish Peace Foundation for her work on peace and disarmament, and the Champions of the Earth award from the United Nations Environment Programme in recognition of her government's promotion of sustainability. She also has an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Auckland.

Chancellor, I present to you The Right Honourable Helen Elizabeth Clark ONZ for admission to the degree of Doctor of Laws (*honoris causa*), and I invite you to confer the degree upon her.