

With Mai Chen's changes as of 20 September

### **AWLA Cultural Extravaganza 2023**

Auckland Women Lawyers' Association had the privilege of hosting its first-ever Cultural Diversity fund-raising function on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2023 at the Glasshouse, Auckland. AWLA committee members in attendance were Anjeet Singh, Heena Gherra, Menka Reddy, Samridhi Gupta & Moezella Saulala and me.

This event brought together many diverse faces in their unique cultural attires to celebrate each other's cultural values, communities, and heritage. This event honoured the diverse representation, both within the legal fraternity as well as the wider community.

This was not a time to armour up with qualifications, achievements, and social status. This was a special time to connect with each other through our diverse cultural identity, mana and sense of community.

Behind AWLA is a village of diverse woman pioneers. We had the privilege of hearing from Mai Chen. Mai Chen was born in Taiwan and immigrated to New Zealand when she was six and a half years old. Mai Chen later won 8 scholarships, including one to Harvard Law School. She is one of New Zealand's most respected constitutional and administrative law experts, specialising in central and local government policy and legislation, regulatory issues, white collar crime and Te Titriti Te Tiriti o Waitangi issues and is an accomplished public law litigator. She also specialises in evidential issues concerning culturally and linguistically diverse litigants. At the event, Mai Chen reminded us that we each have a contribution to make to law and business which is unique to who we are and the journeys we have walked. We need to be brave enough to leave that legacy even if it isn't popular or conventional. That is the only way to change the world. We are grateful to Mai Chen for generously taking time out of her own busy schedule to support us. Her speech was truly inspirational.

This event was organised by AWLA, with Anjeet Singh being the driving force behind it. The fund-raising Cultural Extravaganza on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2023 was an enormous success. It was one of the best legal events I have attended as it was both

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educational and fun. The event began with a Karakia led by Rachel and Phil Raukawa. Cultural performances included: an exciting Cook Island performance, followed by an incredible modern Middle Eastern dance performance, and concluding with a sensational Bhangra performance. There was a wonderful atmosphere of collegiality and inclusiveness. We were all taught some amazing Bhangra dance moves by our Indian dance group: Bhangra Fit. Every single person in the room was dancing to amazing Punjabi music! It was truly spectacular!

The purpose of this event was to raise funds for the AWLA scholarship fund. Together, we raised money to help change a young woman's life for the better by contributing to her education. It was fantastic that everyone was on board with our goal of fundraising for the AWLA School Leaver's Scholarship.

AWLA would like to express its appreciation and gratitude to Anjeet, for initiating and organising this event. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Anjeet. On 2 May 2023, for charitable work and community service, Anjeet was honoured at the House of Lords by an NGO with a very prestigious award named the Bharat Gaurav Award. Bharat Gaurav translates to "Pride of India". Through her projects over the past twenty years, including the AWLA Cultural Extravaganza 2023, Anjeet has made the citizens of India (the land of her ancestors), Fiji (her birthplace) and New Zealand (her home) proud.

AWLA is also grateful to our donors and sponsors for making this event a huge success. The mana of Aotearoa New Zealand's legal profession is significantly enhanced by us celebrating its diversity. It was truly a privilege to be a part of this wonderful event.

We have received thoughtful and positive feedback from our guests. AWLA acknowledges Anjeet's and Moe's attention to detail and the very considerable effort they have made in making this event memorable.

Anoushka Bloem  
AWLA President