New Zealand & Maori Reach Land Deal

New Zealand and seven Maori tribes have signed the largest settlement to date. The settlement seeks to compensate violations of an 1840 treaty with the Maori, the Treaty of Waitangi. Over 400,000 acres of North Island forests, worth over $300 million, will be given back to Maori tribes. [1]

The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi was an agreement between the Maori and New Zealand that made governance of New Zealand possible. Although New Zealand lacks a written constitution, the treaty is generally regarded as one of the most significant founding documents of its early era. As terms of the treaty, the Maori ceded sovereignty over New Zealand, while the Crown was given exclusive rights to buy Maori lands. The Maori also were guaranteed full property rights over their lands, rivers, and forests. After the government had repeatedly dismissed the treaty's significance, its attitude changed. The Waitangi Tribunal was created in 1975 to address grievances arising from breaches of the agreement and submit non-binding recommendations to the government. The recent settlement arose from a recommendation submitted by the Tribunal.[2]

Sources:
Ray Lilley, "New Zealand Maori sign major grievance settlement" Associated Press (24 June 2008).

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[1] Ray Lilley, "New Zealand Maori sign major grievance settlement" Associated Press (24 June 2008).
[2] Kathy Marks, "A £160m apology to the Maoris for shameful history of injustice" The Independent(25 July 2008).