

**POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 21 MARCH 2021
HANSARD TRANSCRIPT**

PM: Kia ora koutou katoa. Good afternoon. Today, I am accompanied by Chief of Defence, Air Marshal Kevin Short as we have further announcements to make shortly on *New Zealand's response to the invasion of *Ukraine.

But, first, I can confirm that, following *Cabinet's discussions, on Wednesday I will set out changes to *COVID settings in *New Zealand. I'll detail what this means for our vaccine passes, mandates, and the *COVID protection framework, particularly as it relates to the period in which we're coming through the peak of Omicron, giving everyone plenty of time to prepare. In the meantime, over the next 48 hours, there are some additional pieces of work we need to finalise. We'll be updating guidance, preparing orders, and ironing out some final details to ensure everything is as straightforward as possible. I look forward to updating you on that work soon.

Over the weekend, I had the opportunity to speak with the *Prime Minister of *Ukraine. His first comment was to acknowledge the speed of *New Zealand's response. While we did not originally have an autonomous sanctions regime, our travel bans and export controls were amongst the first imposed, and this had been noticed by the *Prime Minister. The bulk of our discussion centred, though, on the current situation and what more we could do to assist. We agreed to have our defence *Ministers make further contact. In the meantime, like many other countries, we have received information on what needs *Ukraine and its people have on the ground.

As a result of that exchange and *Cabinet meeting today, we have pledged an additional \$5 million to support *Ukraine as they continue with the defence of their homeland. This will include a contribution to the NATO trust fund to provide immediate, non-lethal military assistance, such as much needed fuel, military rations, communications, and military first-aid kits. Today, the *Government has also decided to support the *Ukrainian armed forces with tactical defence equipment such as body armour, helmets, and vests. Today's announcement adds to rolling economic sanctions we've imposed through the newly enacted Russia Sanctions Act, as well as \$6 million previously provided in humanitarian support, bringing our total contribution to \$11 million.

Today, I can also update you that, since we opened the 2022 special *Ukraine visa last week, *Immigration New Zealand has received 314 sponsorship requests from *Ukrainians in *New Zealand and 33 visa applications. There has been strong community engagement and interest. I understand that people are already arriving from *Ukraine on other visas, and I know we'd all wish to welcome them and wish them well.

At the conclusion of my call with the *Ukrainian *Prime Minister, I noted that *New Zealand may not be the largest country, but we were standing ready to do what we could. His response was a reminder of what solidarity means. He said, "There are no bigger or smaller countries. There are only those that react." Last week, the first tranche of regulations under the Russia Sanctions Act were passed, imposing travel bans on 350 people in key political military roles in the Russian Federation, as well as asset freezes on President *Putin and *members of the Russian Security Council. Officials are now working to progressively add to that list, including looking into Russian people with notable investment in *New Zealand, and we'll have more to say on this in the coming weeks. The sanctions imposed from around the world are having an effect, and so *New Zealand will continue to play its role in supporting our partners to oppose this war. We have and we will keep reacting.

I'll now hand over to the Chief of Defence.

Air Marshal Kevin Short: As you've heard from the *Prime Minister, the *Government has decided to support *Ukrainian armed forces through the provision of tactical defence equipment such as body armour, helmets, and vests, and this is in direct response to specific requests from the *Ukrainian *Government. Now, that equipment, which is currently held by

the *New Zealand Defence Force and will be sent to *Ukraine, includes 1,066 body armour plates, 473 helmets, and 571 camouflage vests. Now, we will work to look at the best way to get that material delivered to *Ukraine, and it's likely that we'll use NZDF transport, their aircraft, and we'll talk to the *Australians to look at whether they can also provide support. Importantly, this equipment is actually on the shelves and available immediately. Thank you.

PM: Thank you, Chief of Defence. We're now happy to take questions.

Media: Is there any consideration of sending a Herc' or another aircraft over to help evacuate people that just want to come back to *New Zealand from *Ukraine?

PM: Look, at this present point in time we know that there's a huge flood of people coming across the borders, and from there there are commercial options available. Some of the options that would be able to be provided by New Zealand would often be more time-consuming and potentially less efficient than some of those. The biggest struggle of course is people getting over the border in the first place, with no commercial options essentially available within country. We do have—as I think I mentioned today—we have our people in the vicinity of the border to support people then with onward travel.

Media: Why have we stopped short of weaponry?

PM: So the decision has been made by Cabinet to provide what is really critical essential goods that have been asked for by Ukraine. They have sought body armour, they have sought helmets, they have sought rations, and essentially the equipment that we are looking to provide today. They've also sought lethal aid as well, and that's often being responded to by other countries. I think what's important is that their needs are being met in ways that every country can contribute. We haven't yet made the decision to add those additional forms of support. One thing I would say is that we have less scope than many countries to provide it, and it would be a fundamental change in approach. It hasn't been removed from the table, but at this stage we believe the non-lethal aid is a difference we can make.

Media: Prime Minister, I've been told that several hundred Kiwis are wanting to go to the Ukraine to fight with the people there. Would they be in contravention of any law in this country if they did that?

PM: I do not believe so. They would be acting contrary to the travel advice which we have issued, which is "do not travel", for obvious reasons. But no, I do not believe, to the best of my knowledge, that there would be any legal impediment to their travel.

Media: What is that equipment—the body armour plates and helmets, and the camouflage vests—worth to the New Zealand Defence Force?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: I don't actually know the value of that. It's been asked for, and we will provide it. It is the only stock that we can actually provide at the moment. It isn't in large numbers, but, as the Ukraine Government have said, any help is wanted.

Media: What would we be doing with that, usually?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: What we happen to be doing is going through a replacement process. So our soldier systems upgrade is a project under way and it's to look at lighter armour, lighter helmet for our soldiers' use, and so this equipment has become available.

PM: This timing really enables us—whilst we're making a transition with the kit that our own Defence Force has—enables us to use kit that otherwise either be surplus or onsold to be made available to those who need it right now in Ukraine. And as has been said, even if it's kit that has been used previously, it is much better than what they have, which is in some case no protection at all.

Media: How old is the equipment?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: I don't know. I wouldn't like to speculate, sorry.

Media: How do you not know how old the equipment is?

PM: Look, we'll see if we can follow up with that with a rough estimate of the value of the kit as well.

Media: Would you define Vladimir Putin* as a war criminal?

PM: Well, look, certainly there have been calls for the consideration of the international community through the processes that we have for him to be tried in that way. And look, I imagine that, you know, in the future there will continue to be calls for him to be held to account for what he has done.

Media: Do you think he has committed war crimes?

PM: Well, we have the institutions that are in place to be able to determine that, and I think that these acts should be scrutinised and they need to be held to account. It's not for me to make a judgment that is for our international bodies to undertake. Is what he's doing morally wrong and reprehensible? Absolutely. Should he be held to account by the world? Yes.

Media: You said that you spoke to the President* of Ukraine. Could you kind of give us a little bit more—

PM: Prime Minister.

Media: —Prime Minister, my mistake—insight into that conversation, how did he feel, what else did you talk about?

PM: I came away from what would have been a roughly 20-minute phone conversation just astounded at the resilience. I cannot imagine what it would be to be in the situation where you're having to relay what is happening to your people on a daily basis, and yet be so calm, resolute, thoughtful, and equally to even be in the position to share thanks to a country on the other side of the world for their contribution. I found it a remarkable thing.

Media: And what were your impressions of the man himself?

PM: That he was absolutely focused. You know, everything I think you see in the response from, you know, the Ukrainian community: just that focus, that determination, that extraordinary resilience, that strength and courage. That's what I saw in this leader.

Media: And will you seek to have a conversation with any Russian Government officials or maybe even Putin himself?

PM: Yeah, so what was really critical for us was that we had received a request for a call just prior—if I can recall—to when things became very critical. So we wanted to make sure that we timed our call in such a way that it could be helpful and also meant that we could build it into our ongoing contributions. We have to balance that against the fact that they are in the middle of a war right now.

Media: Prime Minister, can you explain why a major change to New Zealand's border arrangements, allowing unvaccinated citizens to travel home and not isolate, was made not in a press release but with a news item posted to the MIQ website on Friday?

PM: Do you mind, Henry, if—this is, of course, given I've already answered this question this morning; this is not me detracting from your question—but do you mind for the sake of the Chief of Defence Force if we cover off Ukraine and then I come straight back to you as soon as we move past those topics? Who have I got on Ukraine? OK, Ben.

Media: How has the Russian Government fed back its thoughts on New Zealand providing aid to Ukraine?

PM: To be honest, I have not yet received a *read-out on their response. That's not to say there hasn't been one, but it may well be that they're focused on some of the sanctions from other countries and other leaders. You have seen retaliatory action; you have seen other leaders placed on travel bans. It would not be a surprise to me if we are added on to those lists, but I haven't received a brief on that yet. I'm not intending to travel to Russia any time soon, regardless.

Media: Just following Jess's question to the Air Marshal, are these like hand-me-downs or can you just provide more information about the working order of this—?

PM: Just going to point out that many of these would be for resale, so I'm not sure that's a fair characterisation.

Air Marshal Kevin Short: So our system of supplying military equipment is a rolling programme. So some of this equipment, for instance, I would have worn when I went to *Afghanistan. What it does have is a manufacturer's lifetime on it. It's a bit like your five-year warrantee on your car. It doesn't mean it suddenly is not useable, and we will check that as we hand this equipment over. Our reason for moving it on is providing our soldiers the best equipment possible, and so we've gone to a lighter-weight system so that all of the equipment someone is expected to carry can be done effectively. And so we're moving to a more modern system, but this equipment is still serviceable and available, and we will check that.

PM: Another really important point to make: we did make inquiries around the availability of stock were we to procure it rather than using what we have currently on hand ourselves. And that demonstrated that there is a large amount of demand—other countries wanting to support Ukraine in the same way—so I can't tell you how long the wait time is, but that demand suggests to me that we are best to still provide what we have available in the meantime.

Media: Have you received any advice on the impact of the initial sanctions you've taken last week? You know, has there been any tangible effect on assets in New Zealand or is it largely symbolic, given the high level at which you've targeted them?

PM: Of course, taken as a whole, you can see the global impact of the sanctions in terms of the impact on the Russian economy. I haven't received analysis of the individual activity that we've undertaken, but, as we already said when we started with this bill, we have relatively limited investment coming into New Zealand from Russia, and we were not anticipating any through the *Overseas Investment Act at that time. So, harder to assess—probably, I'd say the maritime space, the air space, travel bans are all meaningful, but we may not be able to list whether or not it deterred individuals from travelling.

Media: The National Party has also queried why there weren't any banks included—it was just one being PSB, and not any of the other central banks—

PM: It is tranche one, and so, of course, we continue to undertake further assessments, and we've worked alongside our international partners in that first tranche, and we're undertaking a bit more individualised assessment for future bans.

Media: Prior to today, New Zealand's aid to Ukraine had been humanitarian in nature: money to the Red Cross. This is obviously a clear pivot now that this is military aid. Is there something in particular in the nearly month-long Russian invasion that has made Cabinet want to take that change?

PM: Well, the first thing I'd point out is that, actually, we had been asking the questions around other forms of non-lethal aid—particularly, protective equipment—and then, coming between the Defence Force and ourselves, this is where we've landed today. So we have had that discussion. So that's not necessarily particularly new. And that's because we knew that was a need that the *Ukrainian people had. You're right to point out, though, that this is significant. It's not a decision we take lightly, but as you've seen from the response of the global community in *New Zealand, we consider what is happening in *Ukraine as a massive disruption to the international rules-based order, and because of that, it impacts all of us. And that's why we have taken these extraordinary measures.

Media: And just following up on Barry's question, with the requests for tactical aid from the *Ukrainians, other countries have sent *Javelin missiles; they've sent anti-aircraft missiles. Do we have enough stock at all in the NZDF where we could send some over in useful quantities?

PM: In small numbers.

Air Marshal Kevin Short: In very small numbers. And, in fact, when it came to the protective equipment, the first answer was “This is our stock.” It wasn’t enough for them to say, “Yes, send them over.” But, in the two weeks since that request, they’ve said, “We will take anything you can offer. We’re in that situation now.”

Media: Have you considered buying more?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: It’s a three-year lead time—as an example.

PM: As I say, the supply chain issues are real.

Media: Has there been any further discussion around bringing in a quota for refugees from *Ukraine?

PM: Not at this stage, because, of course, you’ll recall that we reached out to the UNHCR proactively, and they’ve made no requests at this stage for the use of *New Zealand’s refugee quota. That is always a process that takes a bit more time, which is why they encouraged us to consider options that we have already now put in place, in particular the special purpose two-year visa for family members of residents and citizens here. And, as you can see, that’s being taken up now.

Media: Would *New Zealand be open to going above the quota if that was a request?

PM: Look, we’ll receive any requests and then give it consideration, but, as yet, none have been received. We do have to always be mindful: with the refugee quota, it does come with a significant amount of wraparound support. It’s the Refugee and Migrant Centre. It is support for housing. It’s welfare support. It is very intensive. We’ve scaled up to double that quota, but we’re always very cautious about making sure we can do it properly. If you’ve got family here, we can move more quickly, because we can assume family can provide that support.

Media: Can we expect to see *Government expenditure on Defence increase more than it otherwise would have come the Budget due to the war?

PM: There is a number of pressures on our Defence Force, particularly around the Defence Force estate, around retention of workforce, but all of those are for Budget consideration. So I won’t say anything further on that now.

Media: Just on that, I mean, some of those things would have been in train previously, before the war, but in light of the war and all sorts of geopolitical issues that are raised, will we consider spending more on Defence?

PM: Keeping in mind that this theatre of war is at a great distance from *New Zealand and that most of the call on our support is through means such as contributions to the NATO trust fund.

Media: Is that a naive approach, actually, because we are a very interconnected—

PM: No, it is not.

Media: Can you just clarify whether we have been asked to provide lethal aid?

PM: So my recollection: all of the requests are very generally posed, as opposed to specific to *New Zealand, and so the general requests have gone out for a raft of forms of support. But it’s fair to say that what we’re providing is very much on those lists, but so are things like rations, sleeping bags, a whole range of things.

Media: And to be clear: we’re not sending lethal aid because that would require a change in our position, as in *New Zealand would see itself as a peaceful nation—

PM: No—

Media: So what is the reasoning behind not sending it, given that they have put the call out there?

PM: *Ukraine has asked for a range of supports, and actually funding to the NATO trust fund, as we have pledged today, is one of the fastest ways we can get support through, because—so the use of that fund: they do consult with *Ukraine on the ground to ensure that they're providing what is needed and required. And so it is much quicker than *New Zealand, for instance, simply sending over provisions that we may have here. The exception here is we are providing body armour and helmets because there are supply constraints, and it's best to just get what we have available over there as quickly as we can. For lethal aid, there are several reasons: 1) *New Zealand does not have large supply of some of what *Ukraine is asking for, and the lead times for purchasing are years, not weeks. The second reason is that is a significant decision to make, but actually we can contribute through a range of means and we'll be fulfilling the ask that *Ukraine has right now by doing so.

Media: And just to clarify as well, so you mentioned before that we have previously offered non-lethal aid before but we were told that we didn't have enough to send, and then they have since asked that—

PM: Yes, that's not something I can speak to.

Media: We have been asked and offered before, but it wasn't accepted?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: We received a request. We looked at that request and went back and said, "These are the numbers that we could supply." If you go back a few weeks, they said, "No, we need a lot more than that." Now they've come back and said, "What you have is accepted. Please deliver." So it's a change in expectations as much as—

PM: I know that, for instance, Finland has provided roughly half of what we are. So you can see there that, actually, if we've got it available, countries have been asked to provide it.

Media: Are you satisfied with the contribution the Defence Force made to dealing with the protesters at *Parliament, and what will you do differently to ensure you could contribute more effectively if we see anything else like that?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: We were asked to provide support, and where we could, we did. There's a step process on who can make that decision, because if you—

Media: What support were you not able to provide that you were asked to?

PM: You'll remember that there was a general request for things like towing equipment, which actually just wasn't something that the Defence Force had in the manner that the Police wanted it, and I think we talked about that at the time.

Air Marshal Kevin Short: Yes, we've got emergency recovery vehicles for large vehicles. They're not designed for towing or having anything serviceable afterwards.

Media: So will you make sure that we do have that in place?

Air Marshal Kevin Short: No—no, because it's the military role that we buy equipment for. If it also has a role that helps Police or other civil agencies, of course we'll offer it, but we, in general, won't buy equipment that is specific for a civilian role.

PM: We'd absolutely consider, and will consider, whether or not that's something that the Police may need, but of course if it's of no use to the Defence Force, there's no cause to have them procure it. OK—let me just check whether or not we're done on *Ukraine.

Media: *Prime Minister, *Māori housing providers are asking why there is no tax on ghost houses?

PM: OK, anything further—sorry, I will come back to you—on *Ukraine, and then I'll call time. Thomas, and last one, Michael, and then we'll shift to that part of the—

Media: Going to this NATO trust fund, presumably there are other countries who contribute lethal aid. The money goes there too, right? So how do you make sure that *New Zealand's money doesn't get spent on weapons?

PM: This is something that is familiar and already in play with NATO. The NATO trust fund is able to make that distinction.

Media: We're almost a month into this Russian invasion of *Ukraine. What is your high-level thinking about the way out of this situation?

PM: I think everyone would keep pointing to the need for negotiations to find a resolution, because otherwise it's just ongoing escalation and death. OK, thank you, Chief of Defence. I think that's everything for you. Thank you. I really appreciate your time. I will come back in the order in which I took them. So—Henry?

Media: *Prime Minister, did you have any legal advice—did the *Government have any legal advice—that prompted it to remove the vaccination requirement part of MIQ, and why did you not announce it [*inaudible*] every other border change?

PM: So every decision that we take is informed by a range of different factors: health-based factors; of course, whether or not the balance is right between the health ramifications and the imposition on someone's rights. The number of *New Zealanders coming in who are unvaccinated is relatively small, and it's because many countries, of course, or airlines, have vaccine requirements. We did, at the time that we considered the border reopening, also look at this question of: given we're moving to self-isolation for everyone else, is it now time to move to self-isolation for this small group of people? The decision was taken at that time, at the same time as we made all of those other border decisions, communicated directly to those affected, and then communicated more broadly. Look, the issue as to whether or not it was done via press—it's not something that I am involved in that level of decision making, as to whether it's done via a press statement or a website.

Media: Sorry, just to be clear, you had legal advice—

PM: What I've said to you is that we had a range of advice, including health advice, on whether or not, for a very small group of people, whether or not we needed to continue. Keeping in mind it is a small group. I wouldn't say that that holds for all unvaccinated travellers.

Media: Since that recent case on the mandates in the police [*inaudible*] has the tenor of your legal advice on the wide variety of vaccine mandates and vaccine passes changed?

PM: No. In fact, even—you'll remember, before that case, before the court case, I stood here in this very room and said that once we came to a point where we were coming down the other side of the peak that we would be looking to change up vaccine passes and mandates. So that actually predated that court case.

Media: Māori housing providers are asking: why no tax on ghost houses?

PM: So houses where there are no tenants?

Media: Correct.

PM: So this is an issue that we've had raised with us before, but some of—we've then asked, and I've specifically asked local government whether or not they believe that this is a large-scale problem in their cities or towns. The feedback I've had is that that's not the major contributing factor to undersupply, that they didn't see it as something that will necessarily solve the housing issues that they may be facing. The *flip side—and talked about planning issues and covenants and a range of other issues that they saw as being more problematic. So we have asked about it, but no one's confirmed that it's a major, widespread problem.

Media: Not even in Auckland, where there's an estimated 43,000?

PM: No, no. So, no, that's not something that—my recollection is that that's not the case. But, again, maybe more of a question for councils. It is difficult to quantify, but when we've talked about the range of solutions we've been willing to look at, often vacant land gets raised much more than vacant housing.

Media: What advice have you received from Māori in regards to the changes, borders, mandates, passes—what conversations have you had?

PM: Yeah, generally the feedback around just—you know, and it's been consistent. Every time we've made a change or signalled that we're making a change, there's always been concern around impact on vulnerable communities. And it's our job to make sure that we build that into our thinking, that we assess the likely impacts, that we mitigate them as much as we can. And so we have had that feedback, similar to the past—where, of course, you'll remember that there was a hesitance for us to move out of lockdowns, to move into the new COVID protection framework, and so there's still that concern. But as we've always done, we'll look for ways to make sure that we offset that.

Media: And what kind of—have Māori told you specifically, “Don't lift the mandates on healthcare workers.”?

PM: Oh, I don't know whether we've had that specificity. We might have. I'd need to go and check. What I've received is general—very general—feedback around just making sure that we're careful around any phasing or change in our settings.

Media: Now that we're at this stage, though—

PM: But nor have we proposed—nor have we said—that they are going. So I'd just be cautious about that. We have said that there will be some areas that mandates will still apply, particularly where it's individuals working with our vulnerable communities.

Media: We're almost three years deep into the pandemic, though. Do you think it's time to get specific with Māori advice? We've seen it come up time and time again.

PM: So I have received feedback from some of our Māori groups. All I'm saying is, I would not wish to misquote what may have come through specifically on one element of mandates. But nor would I want to leave the impression that that's something they need to be concerned about.

Media: Can you please give more detail about the inquiry that the *IPCA is looking at into the occupation? Is that related to the 1,600 complaints or is it something separate?

PM: My understanding is: separate. But we're waiting for formal confirmation of what the IPCA, who is independent, intends to do, and I expect that we'll hear from them this week.

Media: Given there are a number of agencies—a number of institutions—involved in this, is it going to be broad enough? I mean, it's quite—I mean, obviously the police involvement was significant, but isn't it too narrow when you look at the entirety of this event from the start of the convoy to the end of it?

PM: Yeah, well I think it would be important for us to look at their terms of reference before making a judgment as to whether or not everything that needed to be included or that we'd expect to be, is. If there are areas where we know that—you know, there's a public interest that we have a greater understanding and that we look into, then we'll look at that. But at this stage, we don't have their terms of reference to make that call.

Media: Why wouldn't you order an inquiry independent of the IPCA if a Government inquiry to look at it in its entirety, given the significance of that event—

PM: Because the IPCA is independent. And I think it's important that we have an independent voice in this—particularly because, of course, some of the complaints will be coming from those who were part of it. And so, I think having the independence is an important element.

Media: Should select committees be using their majority to block, for example, the Police Commissioner being brought in to brief on this? Is that appropriate?

PM: Well, ultimately, if you want to have an independent look at what happened, you would seek someone who is able to provide that independent voice, and that would be the

IPCA. I would also add that, of course, the commissioner does appear before those select committees, but not necessarily in an ad hoc way.

Media: But why would the IPCA be the only body, or organisation or any—you know, apart from select committees, actually looking at this? I mean, is that going to rule out any other—

PM: Wouldn't you—I mean, my point would be, you know, for something as serious as this, we want the body, an institution that has the direct legal authority, to inquire directly into the Police's operational response. No one has the basis to do that in quite the same pre-established way as the IPCA does. They have the knowledge, the experience, the operational understanding, and the inquiry powers to do that, so they are well placed. But what I've undertaken is that once we've received their terms of reference, then we'll be in a better position to judge whether or not there are gaps.

Media: Prime Minister, can you give the public a bit more of a steer on the decisions that Cabinet made today about easing those COVID protections?

PM: In the next 48 hours, we'll use that time to make sure that some of the changes that were made even this afternoon by Cabinet—that we have finalised those, that we have updated the advice, that we've identified any knock-on effects from the decisions we've made so that they're all as clear as they can be and ready to go for Wednesday.

Media: Prime Minister, why do people—

PM: One thing I will add: there is no—there is literally no one that will be impacted by us taking those extra 48 hours, because the changes aren't immediate.

Media: I was just going to ask why do people have to wait until Wednesday? Why can't you tell them today?

PM: It's not unusual, of course, for Cabinet to make decisions in the meeting and in the room that we are yet to then go back and make sure that we have not created any knock-on effects or consequences; that we're able to draft the orders and regulation in time to update and change the guidance. I think plenty of you in this room would criticise me if I came down an hour after making a decision and couldn't answer some of those questions because we hadn't taken that time. What I can tell you is that no one will be fundamentally worse off as a result. Many of the decisions won't take immediate effect. We'll be casting forward, and so no one's materially worse off from us making sure we just take those 48 hours to get it right.

Media: Prime Minister, academics around the country are once again calling for a nationwide review into racism in universities. Can you commit to a review?

PM: Look, I know that some of these issues have been raised within institutions and campuses. We, of course, have a responsibility as a country to make sure that we're doing the work that we need to to make sure that we've got all the infrastructure right—you know, that our hate legislation and all of the bodies who have the duty of care in this space are well supported and resourced—but when it comes to particular environments, we do need to see responsibility also taken within those campuses.

Media: What would it take to see a review into racism in universities?

PM: Again, as I say, you know, this is an area where I would expect there to be some responsibility taken at those individual campus levels, and we continue to do our part, particularly as part of the royal commission of inquiry following *March 15, where there was a lot of recommendations in this space, and that's the area where we're progressing.

Media: Prime Minister, Countdown and Fletcher Building have both chosen to force workers to use their leave when they isolate at home with COVID. What's your view on what companies should do about that?

PM: Yeah, so, look, I've had this raised, and it would be worth having a chat to Minister Michael Wood, who's been dealing with some of the different scenarios that arise. If someone is unwell with COVID, then, obviously, they are sick, and we have extended sick leave to

make sure, of course, that people are able to be supported if they need to take time off. Otherwise, though, for isolation, we do have the leave support payment, and it's there to try and support the fact that there will be those required to stay at home who may not themselves be unwell but are actually giving a public health benefit by being at home as well. So there is an expectation that that leave support payment is used under those kinds of circumstances.

Media: Rod Jackson is saying don't drop our defences, don't remove any of the public health measures for another—

PM: To be fair, Rod Jackson is saying that once we come down off the peak, that's when he would expect to see changes.

Media: But, yeah, for another two, to three to four weeks, is what he is saying.

PM: I would be very happy to have those debates once we have finalised and then make the announcements around those decisions. But today it would be purely speculative.

Media: Will you make any changes before the—

Media: Prime Minister—

PM: Can I just—honestly, guys, we've had 35 minutes. If we can just take a couple more in order. Claire.

Media: There was some flooding in Auckland this morning—

PM: Sorry, what was that?

Media: There was some flooding in Auckland this morning, including on your own street. Have you had any reports about the scale of the damage or if it's your own house?

PM: There's a lot of water. But I don't know. I believe that it's fine.

Media: Prime Minister?

PM: Yes. I will finish here, just in the back. Benedict, I'll take you and then I'll finish with Jenna.

Media: Will you make any—

PM: Oh I was—either or. Jenna?

Media: Will you make any changes before that two to three to four - week period that *Rod Jackson is calling for you to pause for?

PM: Oh, look. That's essentially asking me to make announcements today, and I just won't do that. But, of course, what I will say is that we have taken into account the feedback from all of our experts around the best time to make these alterations. But we've already long signalled that what we'll be looking to do is once we have confidence that we're coming down, that's the time when vaccine passes do have less impact, because more people will have had COVID and we're already 95 percent vaccinated.

Media: More broadly than passes, restriction wise, will there be any changes before—

PM: Again—again: 48 hours. We just need some time to finalise some of the work that we're doing at the moment. If you'd prefer me not to flag in the future when we're making announcements, we can happily do that as well.

Media: I was talking to immunocompromised people today who were saying that they're really worried about you removing vaccine passports—or vaccine passes, right. They say at the moment they can go out to a restaurant or to a café and they feel safe because they know that the people there are vaccinated. If you remove those, they're worried that you're kind of effectively saying that they can't go out in public any more—that they have to live their lives at home.

PM: No, not at all. And this is why, despite a huge amount of pressure for us to have removed those some time ago, we haven't, because one of the things that we factored in is

roughly there are 190,000 New Zealanders right now eligible who haven't been vaccinated. After this significant outbreak, a number of those will have had COVID-19 and that means that the benefit of those vaccine passes is significantly reduced, and that is why we'll then be in a position to make those decisions. We've been very clear: we have a duty of care to everyone but particularly the immunocompromised; we're making these decisions carefully, and they will be well balanced with their health and wellbeing in mind, alongside everyone else's.

conclusion of press conference