

**PRESS CONFERENCE: TUESDAY, 5 APRIL 2016**

**PM:** OK. Good morning, everyone. Well, I'm pleased to announce that the Government is nominating Helen Clark for the position of UN Secretary-General. There are major global challenges facing the world today and the United Nations needs a proven leader who can be pragmatic and effective. Having served as the Prime Minister of New Zealand for 9 years and holding one of the top jobs in the United Nations for the past 7 years, Helen has the right mix of skills and experience for the job.

Coming from New Zealand, Helen is well-placed to bridge divisions and indeed to get results. She has a vast amount of experience in international affairs. She is a great listener and a tremendous communicator. I talked to Helen on a number of times over the past year, but only recently did she advise me of her decision to formally pursue the role.

Our nomination means that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade will now work with Helen on her campaign, and, as I have previously said, I will do all that I can to help her secure the job. There is no doubt it will be a highly contested position, as it's a very important one. But I am confident Helen has what it takes and is the best person for the job. By announcing Helen's nomination today it means she can start presenting her case to the UN General Assembly, which is holding preliminary meetings with candidates in New York next week.

The first straw poll is expected to be conducted in July. The new Secretary-General will be appointed at the end of the year by the UN General Assembly and on the recommendation of the UN Security Council.

**Media:** Will having a seat on the Security Council be any advantage or disadvantage in your view?

**PM:** Well, I think it might be a very slight advantage. So the way the process ultimately works is there's a recommendation from the UN Security Council, and so, of course, the Permanent Five, as we know, have a veto right; the other 10 do not. But, ultimately, we are mixing with those people on a more regular basis, so it's not an unhelpful thing.

**Media:** How much do you expect this New Zealand support for the bid to cost?

**PM:** Well, it'll certainly run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. What will ultimately happen is any resources will be found from foreign affairs' baseline. Initially what will happen is there'll be some staff that'll be seconded to be with Helen and provide her the support that she will need. As you would expect, on any travel that she might undertake in relation to her candidacy, that will be paid for by us. There'll be some small promotional material that's put together. And, also, it depends how long her candidacy runs. I mean, if she gets all the way to the finishing line, then the cost will be a little bit more.

**Media:** Do you know who will run her campaign?

**PM:** Look, there's a group of people that she has known in foreign affairs and who she has great confidence with, who are well-versed in this system, and they'll be working alongside her. I think they'll be names that to those of you who know the MFAT people will be quite commonly held names.

**Media:** How do we get the Security Council to endorse her bid?

**PM:** Well, I think ultimately we've got to work one person at a time. I mean, the most important, obviously, are the P5 because they hold the veto, and so any one of them could veto a candidate. Also, secondly, of course, you know, there are many people who are putting their name forward, and so what will be interesting will be to see, you know, if the veto's applied, or at least if it's, you know, threatened to be applied, then you could see candidates dropping out. I think that's, you know, one of the big advantages that Helen's

got. Not only is she tremendously talented, but I think she comes from what would be seen as a pretty neutral position. Some candidates may well, sort of, attract the veto from various countries. I just think that's very unlikely in the case of Helen Clark.

**Media:** Do you think Russia will back her?

**PM:** I haven't had any discussions with the Russians, but we'll do that. You know, it's no secret that there's certainly enough talk around that it could be Eastern Europe's chance. But for it to be Eastern Europe's chance, you know, there's got to be a candidate that they're prepared to coalesce around, and, in the end, as we've seen so often in the past, you get a situation where candidates are knocked out by one or other of the P5 members, and ultimately there's a compromise candidate that comes through. There's a very real chance, I think, that Helen could fill that gap.

**Media:** Do you think you have the backing of the US on Helen Clark?

**PM:** Well, I raised the issue with—you know, seriously, obviously when I was in New York last week. I wasn't trying to put them on the spot; I was simply trying to make sure that they were aware that an announcement would be made. What I can tell you is we didn't get any adverse reactions. So there was nobody that either said to me that they didn't think she was hugely capable or immediately said to us, look, that that would be an issue. And so the P5 are notorious for keeping their thoughts to themselves. That's what you would expect them to do, as most countries will because there'll be a variety of people who may still continue to put their name forward.

**Media:** Did you raise it personally with Barack Obama?

**PM:** Yeah, I talked to the administration, as you would expect me to, in the US.

**Media:** Did you raise it with the President of the United States?

**PM:** Yeah. There were wider discussions as well, but I'm quite confident where we're travelling with them.

**Media:** Do you think the fact that we have a representative on the UN Security Council will work for or against Helen Clark being appointed to that job?

**PM:** I think it's an advantage, as I said to Audrey, inasmuch that we're mixing in those circles. I don't think it's a massive winner or loser, one way or the other. I think where there is an advantage is inasmuch that if you look to the voting of the Security Council, we won in the first ballot with an overwhelming amount of support. I think that just feeds into the reputation of New Zealand in terms of its sort of pragmatic and level-headed approach to foreign affairs.

If you think about the role of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, it is the most important diplomatic role in the world. This is the body that shows leadership on behalf of the globe, and I think if you look at Helen Clark, it isn't just the time that she spent in New Zealand as Prime Minister, where she was very dedicated to foreign policy, or her time actually at the UNDP, it's actually her entire life has been dedicated to foreign policy. That's been her area of great passion and interest. She is immensely knowledgeable and incredibly talented, and I think there'll be a lot of people on—you know, who ultimately will have to make a call who will look at her and say this is a person that has great intellect and a deep understanding of the issues.

**Media:** When did she speak with you? When did she inform you?

**PM:** Yeah, so when she was back in New Zealand I had a formal sort of meeting with her. I've been, obviously, talking to her, frankly, for the last 12 months about the issue, and she's been weighing up, you know, whether she would formally put her name forward or not. I think over the Christmas period I suspect, you know, I got a sense that she was sort of firming up, and there's a point at which, you know, she has to put her hat in the ring. I mean, ultimately, of course, she could try and be a very late runner, but it's quite a risky strategy really. So when she came down to New Zealand a week or so ago, just before I left

for Washington, we held a meeting in Auckland. She told me then, and she earlier in the day told the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Murray McCully, that it was her intention to go forward now, and so we made it quite clear to her that, you know, we would, obviously, be backing her. She spent some time working with MFAT on the actual process of nomination, and the letters that's been put forward today [*Inaudible*]

**Media:** These appointments are very political. Do you see this as kind of a Western-backed candidate or is it more of an independent run, would you say?

**PM:** I'm not entirely sure how you can characterise it. I think we won't be characterising it on geographic location. I mean, you're right, they are deeply political and everyone has to be realistic about what we're up against here, which is some good candidates. I could make a very strong case for you that Helen Clark's credentials are far better than any other candidate that is currently on the list or any other that I'm aware that might put their name forward, but, unfortunately, in the world of multilateralism, you know, things aren't quite as simple as that. There is a lot of horse-trading that goes on. It will depend enormously on the views of the P5 if ultimately they feel, you know, it's the turn of the Eastern Europeans or somebody else.

But the one thing that is an advantage is not only the credentials of Helen Clark but also the history of the United Nations is to have leaders that have come from, you know, broadly speaking, smaller countries. I mean, obviously, South Korea is a pretty big country in recent times, but they've, broadly, been smaller countries, and so that fits within the profile of New Zealand.

**Media:** Why then, just to pick up on your point—why then is Helen Clark a better candidate than Irina Bokova, who's a woman, comes from a slightly smaller country, has run a UN organisation? Why is Helen Clark—

**PM:** At its most simplistic level, you could say that, you know, Helen Clark's role is more senior in the UN, but, look, I think it just comes down to the combination of experience that she has had and what she brings to the job. She was a Prime Minister; Irina Bokova was not.

**Media:** Helen Clark would be the first former head of State to be—if she was successful—UN Gen.-Sec. The UN is supposed to represent all countries of the world. Are you worried about her being too close to New Zealand or being seen as that?

**PM:** Well, I think in recent times, firstly, she's had a role on the world stage at the UN, and I suspect her perspective, if you like, in the last 7 years has, by the very nature of the job, forced her to have quite a different perspective to the one that you'd had when you were the leader of a country. When you're the Prime Minister of a country you're forced to take a sort of country perspective, but I think everyone who knows Helen knows that her capacity to understand those broader issues, even when she was the leader of New Zealand, were no—you know, was very broad indeed. So, no, I don't think she'll be seen as somebody that can only see things from a westernised perspective or a Commonwealth country perspective or a small country perspective. I think she's recognised for her capacity to understand the job.

**PM:** I think she's also understood, I think, and recognised, as someone with a very big intellect. I mean, she can, fundamentally, tick the boxes. I mean, this a quirky system, not the least of them being, you know, that there's some expectation that the US Sec.-Gen. will speak some French. Well, Helen Clark can and I'm sure, as we speak, she's brushing up on her French.

**Media:** Her statement today says that she—you know, talks about the UN Charter in her press statement. Kofi Annan said that [*Inaudible*] Iraq in 2004 was not in conformity with the charter. Are you worried, or is she worried, about how that might play out if she doesn't respect the [*Inaudible*] stance?

**PM:** Well, the core of what makes the United Nations work and operate is its charter. People will always have a different perspective. I mean, Helen Clark's view of the Iraq war is well documented and well known. But, actually, you know, President Obama was also opposed to the Iraq war. That didn't stop him both becoming the leader of the free world and, actually, by definition, the leader of arguably the most powerful member of the P5.

**Media:** Do you expect to see Australia to actively campaign on her behalf as well?

**PM:** I think it will depend on what happens if Kevin Rudd puts his name forward. I think, ultimately, if Kevin Rudd does, then I don't have enough intel to tell you what they would do but, you know, natural good grace would tell you that they would probably support an Australian candidate in the first instance. But this is a long race. Certainly there's a lot of respect across the Tasman for Helen Clark, and I think it's a more mixed position in Australia about Kevin Rudd, so, ultimately, let's see. I mean, as I said yesterday, no one should underestimate Kevin Rudd. He also is a super-intelligent man. I personally think Helen's better for the job, but that comes from partly a purely partisan perspective of—

**Media:** Is there anything else playing on your mind when you say Rudd isn't as good as Clark?

**PM:** Oh, no, just, as I said yesterday, I've worked with Helen Clark for a long period of time and, personally, I'd like to see a New Zealander at the head of the United Nations, and I think she would—it would be, you know, a sense of great pride to New Zealanders, actually, that we had the first, you know, Secretary-General from our country.

**Media:** Has Rudd approached you about backing him?

**PM:** No, he hasn't.

**Media:** Will this be a public campaign in any way, or strictly behind closed doors? If it is public, is there anything that the New Zealand public can do to help her?

**PM:** That's a very good question. I think it's, sort of, broadly, largely behind closed doors inasmuch that, you know, ultimately, this is about convincing countries to lend their weight and support through their leadership. And, in the end, while with every country there's a sort of decision-making process that happens at their foreign affairs and, in the case of the US they have their own system, ultimately it is quite personal. I mean, in the end it will come down to, you know, the United States, for instance, or the Russians or the Chinese ultimately deciding which candidate they're going to back. So I don't think New Zealanders will see a lot of it, but they'll see, obviously, some public comments from Helen Clark, and what we'll do now is continue to do what we did, fundamentally, when we were in Washington last week. So when I go to China in 2 weeks' time—which I probably haven't even formally announced, but I guess now I have—I'll take it up with President Xi. That'll save the press conference on that one.

**Media:** On that—actually, while you're talking about China, do you think that our close and increasingly special relationship with China may help Helen Clark in terms of getting their backing for her to take the role?

**PM:** I suspect she's pretty well respected in China. That would be my read of it. I mean, you've got to remember, when New Zealand did the first free-trade agreement with China that a westernised country had done—a developed country had completed—it was Helen Clark that led that. So, look, she's got a lot of friends around the world and her role as UNDP head will also have garnered a lot of support for her because the organisation she runs is big.

**Media:** Would you see her as front-runner at this point?

**PM:** I don't think you'd want to call that. It's just so difficult because there are just so many different elements and so much politics. I mean, as I said, you know, yesterday, this isn't a situation where you can definitely say the best person will get the job. It may come down to many factors. If it was as simple as that, then we could all stand here, I think, with

a high degree of confidence. I think we've got to stand here with a degree of confidence but a degree of realism that, you know, this is just a situation where sometimes a lot of horse-trading goes on. But she's got a very real chance, I believe.

**Media:** If you don't have confidence that the best person will get the job, should it be reformed—should the system be reformed for nominations?

**PM:** Well, there's been some discussions. Of course, you've seen from the United Nations President saying that's exactly the process they're going through. They're intending to go through a more transparent process this time. Yeah, look, I think you just have to be realistic. We all have to be realistic that it's just not quite as simple as saying, you know, on some sort of matrix this person ticks all these boxes and the other person doesn't. There's just a lot that happens behind the scenes in the UN. But, you know, she ticks an awful lot of boxes and that's got to help.

**Media:** Have you heard any view expressed that the US might find her a bit too left-wing?

**PM:** No. There was no push-back in the discussions I had.

**Media:** That \$100,000—what exactly will that be spent on? Will it be memorabilia, for example, or how [*Inaudible*]

**PM:** Well, it will be more than \$100,000; it will be hundreds of thousands. I don't know exactly how many hundreds of thousands, because it will depend, ultimately, on how far she goes and a variety of things. So, largely that will be spent, effectively, on travel and on any promotional material. I mean, there will be a notional allocation of the people that work alongside her, so she'll effectively have secondees in the Secretariat. They are people that are within the system, so for the purposes of good order we'll mark them against this particular campaign. But, truthfully, they're within the system and they'll be met from MFAT's baseline.

**Media:** So will you use, or will New Zealand, use envoys or—sorry, I don't know how to pronounce it—

**PM:** Envoys—yep.

**Media:** —like we did in the Security Council campaign? You know, sort of respected Kiwis who would go and lobby for her—or does it not roll like that?

**PM:** Yes, so we've had that sort of preliminary discussion. I talked to her a bit about when I met with her formally in Auckland. I think that's a possibility—I mean, there could be the odd person where their mana on an international stage means that makes sense. So, for instance, Sir Don McKinnon has some pretty amazing contacts from his time of being, you know—head of the Commonwealth. You know, you have people like Jenny Shipley, who just has a very strong relationship with, you know, Bill Clinton. These are not unhelpful—I mean, everybody knows Helen Clark has a very strong relationship with Tony Blair. I mean, this will be one of those times where we will try and use all the relationships that we've got. So we'll throw everything we can at it practically, but in the end we just have to see how it plays out.

**Media:** If she wins, what does it actually mean for New Zealand?

**PM:** Well, I think it means, in the first instance, that we'd look with great pride that you've seen a New Zealander rise to the highest role in diplomacy in the world. I think in a practical sense, I mean, not a lot changes because the role of the Secretary-General is to, you know, opine and to lead—you know, a very large organisation with thousands of people that, ultimately, has to deal with the biggest challenges in the world: from the Zika virus, to Ebola, through to, you know, Middle East conflicts. So, in reality, not a lot changes from that point of view, but it's no bad thing having a friend and a countryman, if you like, at the top of that organisation.

**Media:** Are you going to China specifically to campaign for Helen Clark's—

**PM:** No—just part of a broader mission, I'm going.

**Media:** How would you rate her chances? Fifty-fifty or better?

**PM:** I don't want to put a number on it, because I really, genuinely, don't know. I think it depends an awful lot on whether, you know, there are disagreements, if you like—for want of a better term—or lack of consensus amongst the other candidates. Because in the end there will be people who will feel very strongly about Irina Bokova or one of the other candidates—there's no question about that—but, ultimately, if they're not acceptable to the others, then all of a sudden the picture can change quite dramatically. So, you know, if a certain person puts their name forward, then they may get support from a certain bloc—for instance, the Latin Americans or the Europeans—but if that candidate is, in the end, no longer left standing, then that needs to shift. And that's one of the big advantages that Helen's got: she's got quite widespread appeal.

One thing I will say is that a number of leaders would echo the view that I would have—that it's high time that the United Nations had a woman as a head of that organisation. I don't think that if Helen Clark gets there it's because she is a woman; I think she gets there for the same reason she got there in all the other things that she's achieved in life, which is that she's very, very talented, amazingly determined, and hard-working. But the truth is, you know, there's got to be some gender balance in that organisation and, you know, to me it's a sort of unacceptable position that it goes on and on and on without having a female leader.

**Media:** Can you just describe a little bit more on the exact kind of nature of the lobbying efforts that you and MFAT are going to carry out?

**PM:** Well, they'll be, sort of, essentially verbal diplomacy, if you like. I mean, I don't think it's the sort of situation where you go and send off a million letters—we can do that, but, I mean, I don't think that's the most effective way forward. We'll use that at both the Foreign Minister's level and at my level to continue to really reinforce her credentials, why we think she's the best person for the job, and seek support for her. It's a very consensus-driven process. As I said, in July I think the first of the straw polls is taken. And so this is a situation where there'll be a lot of discussion in a lot of corridors around the world for the next, you know, few months.

**Media:** In your bid to lobby on her behalf, will you be talking down the other candidates?

**PM:** No, I don't—I, bluntly, don't know them well enough anyway, and I don't think that would be effective. I think it's far more effective to say what we think, which is that Helen's the best person for the job.

**Media:** You were, obviously, an opponent of Helen Clark in an election. Have you become quite friendly with her in the years since and is that an important fact—that you've got to know her better?

**PM:** Well, there's been a developing relationship, if you like, over the last 8 years. I mean, the nature of politics is it's adversarial, and when someone is the leader of your political party and attempting to either retain being Prime Minister or wanting to be Prime Minister, people feel amazingly passionate about that, and if you didn't feel like that, frankly, you don't deserve to be in the job. But I think it doesn't mean that you can't learn to develop respect for somebody, and I always had a lot of respect for Helen Clark; I just didn't agree with the particular policies that she might have had, you know, in totality. Some of them we retained; some of them, clearly, we didn't.

But, you know, over the years I've, you know, been in text conversations with her. I've spoken to her quite a bit. I've seen her a lot. There's just—you know, she's not going to count me on her Rolodex of her top 10 friends, if that's what you're asking me. But would she be able to count on me as someone that I think she can rely on to support her? I think the answer would be yes.

OK. See you soon.

## conclusion of press conference