

## **POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 18 MARCH 2019**

**PM:** Good afternoon everyone. I want to acknowledge that I have the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs with me in case there are any wider questions from a foreign policy perspective or any questions around contact that we've had from other world leaders over the course of the last 72 hours.

Before I begin I want to acknowledge again and use this opportunity to again highlight 1737 as the contact number that anyone can text or call if they are feeling distress, if they have any mental health concerns for themselves or a loved one. We have had, I'm advised, over 500 calls or contacts to the 1737 number. It has ranged from people who simply feel distressed to those themselves— those who have been caught up in the terrorist attack on Friday. So it is a line that has specialist support available and I again encourage those who need it to utilise it.

Let me give you an overview to begin with of the coming days. Tomorrow, as the Leader of the House has advised, members of Parliament will gather in the House at 2pm to make statements of condolence for victims of the Christchurch mosques terror attack. The House will then adjourn for the day and will meet again on Wednesday at 2pm for members' day. On Wednesday, I will return to Christchurch. I will be meeting again with first responders, including St John's ambulance and front-line support staff. I plan on meeting with family members, but I'm also very mindful that families are receiving their loved ones for burial and I certainly intend, and I ask others also, to be respectful of course at this hugely sensitive time.

Today Cabinet was expanded to include representatives from our confidence and supply support partner, the Green Party. It was an opportunity to discuss several key issues and pieces of work, and having all parties around the table has helped to expedite that process. I'll run through now several preliminary decisions that have been made.

Cabinet today made in-principle decisions around the reform of our gun laws. I intend to give further detail of these decisions to the media and public before Cabinet meets again next Monday. This ultimately means that within 10 days of this horrific act of terrorism, we will have announced reforms which will, I believe, make our community safer. In the intervening period, we will be working hard and as quickly as we can to finalise some of the details around the decision Cabinet has made today and the consequences of it.

As a Cabinet, we were absolutely unified and very clear: the terror attack in Christchurch on Friday was the worst act of terrorism on our shores. It was in fact one of the worst globally in recent times. It has exposed a range of weaknesses in New Zealand's gun laws. The clear lesson from history around the world is that to make our community safer, the time to act is now. I know that this might for a short period create a small degree of uncertainty amongst some gun owners, including those who possess guns for legitimate reasons, and I particularly acknowledge those in our rural communities. I want to assure you that the work that we are doing is not directed at you. In fact, I strongly believe that the vast majority of gun owners in New Zealand will agree with the sentiment that change needs to occur. I, in fact, believe that they will be with us.

In the meantime, I want to remind people: you can surrender your gun to the police at any time. In fact I have seen reports that people are, in fact, already doing this. I applaud that effort, and if you're thinking about surrendering your weapon, I would encourage you to do so.

Today it was also agreed that there will be an inquiry to look at the specific circumstances leading up to the Christchurch mosques terror attack on March 15. The purpose of this inquiry is to look at what all relevant agencies knew or could or should have known about

the individual and his activities, including his access to weapons and whether they could have been in a position to prevent the attack.

It will look at whether there were any impediments to the sharing of information, such as legislative or intelligence sharing challenges. The key agencies we'll be looking at include the New Zealand SIS, GCSB, Police, Customs, and Immigration I want to highlight again, though: this is an inquiry that these agencies absolutely support. The inquiry will also look at the individual's travel movements to and from New Zealand, and internationally; his activities in New Zealand; and his use of social media and his connection to others.

The terms of reference are currently being finalised, and decisions around who will lead the inquiry and what form it will take will also be made shortly. Our key considerations will be public confidence in the work, timeliness, and the management of classified information. We're also mindful, of course, that criminal proceedings are under way.

The Government has also had preliminary discussions around ensuring New Zealanders have the ability to commemorate as one the lives lost at Deans Avenue and Linwood mosques. A number of vigils have already been held in local communities throughout New Zealand; I have no doubt that these will continue. In fact, I encourage people to come together. While I will not be announcing the memorial date today, I can assure you that the Department of Internal Affairs will be working in conjunction with the Muslim community, iwi, local government, and the mayor of Christchurch, police, and other agencies.

I can confirm the memorial will not be held this week. We want to ensure that the priority for the coming days is the families' opportunity to grieve together. I will, however, look to announce a date as soon as I am able.

As I said yesterday, the families of those who have lost a loved one can apply for a funeral grant of around \$10,000, which is made available via ACC. What I've made clear to agencies today is that further costs should be covered upfront for these families taking their loved ones overseas. Details around these provisions are currently being finalised by officials, but Victim Support will help manage this process with the victims' families.

There will continue to be high police visibility and presence over coming weeks in Christchurch. I understand this may concern some people, but it is not about a specific threat. As I've said before, this is about taking a precautionary approach and providing reassurance as investigations continue into the terrorist attack on Friday.

We're now both available for any questions that you may have.

**Media:** When you say you want to encourage people to surrender their weapons, are you saying that a ban on semi-automatic weapons is coming?

**PM:** I'm saying that if anyone has a weapon that they either should not be in possession of or that they have concern over the events of Friday, that they are welcome at any time to surrender that weapon to the police. And I simply am encouraging people to do so. Again, to be clear, we have made in-principle decisions today, within 72 hours of this act of terror in New Zealand. What we are taking now is a very short space of time to ensure the details around those decisions are firmed up and that we are ready for implementation.

**Media:** Can you tell us whether those changes will involve semi-automatic—

**PM:** I've already made it clear that a number of New Zealanders question the availability of military-style semi-automatic weapons in New Zealand. However, I will be giving a more fulsome set of details once we've worked through the in-principle decision that Cabinet has made today. I want to also acknowledge, you know, when Australia found itself, tragically, in a similar position to what we find ourselves now, they took 12 days to make their decision; we have taken 72 hours. There is, though, still some detail that needs to be worked through. I want to do that, but still move as quickly as we can.

**Media:** Prime Minister, is it harder than you thought it was going to be?

**PM:** No, no. I absolutely always knew that there would be these kinds of issues to work through. It's, I think, incredible that we've been able to bring together the information needed for the in-principle decision that's already been made; now it's about making sure that some of the details and implementation work is prepared.

**Media:** Would we consider a buy-back scheme?

**PM:** Again, these are the kinds of issues, of course, that add layers of complexity to issues around gun control law changes and management. Of course, if you reflect on what Australia did, that was involved. Those will all be details that I'll be announcing in the very near future.

**Media:** Were the in-principle decisions, whatever they are, supported by New Zealand First?

**PM:** Absolutely. We are of one mind. We are absolutely united as a Cabinet. But you've got the leader here; he can speak for himself.

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** This was a Cabinet decision, and that, Audrey, is your total answer.

**Media:** Would you support a ban, then, on semi-automatic weapons?

**PM:** Again, of course, we're not making the announcement today.

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** You didn't hear me; you didn't hear my answer. This was a Cabinet decision, and that's the total answer.

**Media:** What's different now from when New Zealand First didn't support the recommendations of the select committee inquiry?

**PM:** The select committee, I don't think, to be clear—I'm not sure the select committee went down into the range of issues that have been canvassed between ourselves around issues around availability. So I'm not—happy to put the question, but I don't think that was part of the select committee inquiry, to the best of my knowledge.

**Media:** Prime Minister, what can you tell us about the spike in violent and—

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** Can I just answer that question there. It's rather serious. The reality is we were, at the time, not in Government, and seriously concerned about the access of the gangs to illegal firepower, illegal guns. The reality is, though, that after 1 pm on 15 March, our world changed for ever, and so will some of our laws.

**PM:** Absolutely.

**Media:** Prime Minister, what can you tell us about the spike in threatening or violent messages that are being sent online after the attack?

**PM:** Yeah, one of the horrific things that I, of course, have learned in a very short period of time around events that other countries have experienced before is that this is a trend that has occurred in regions that have experienced these kinds of horrific attacks. We are looking to the lessons that are being learned in other jurisdictions around the patterns that tend to follow: retaliatory messages, suggestions of copycat activity. These are patterns of behaviour, so our agencies are live to that. You'll see the police are taking a precautionary approach with their presence and their activities. It's also one of the reasons that we remain with a threat level of high, just to ensure that our agencies are live to some of those patterns that we see internationally.

**Media:** How bad is that, that spike?

**PM:** I don't have anything that quantifies that. Certainly, our agencies are taking all information seriously. They are taking a precautionary approach. They are focused on ensuring the safety of New Zealanders. That is our number one priority.

**Media:** Have you spoken to Facebook again, Prime Minister, about the live-streaming?

**PM:** I have still the same information. I don't believe I've received an update to the one that we received, I believe, last night, that indicated at that time they had removed—and it would, I'm sure, no doubt, be a higher number now—1.5 million occasions where the video had been loaded. Of course, in the direct aftermath, they removed the offender's Instagram and Facebook account. They are continuing to automatically remove but also, I believe, manually, in some cases, as I understand, remove any replica of that video in any form, whether it's cut or in full.

The point that I would like to make, though, is obviously there's been a proliferation of its availability—1.5 million times. The fact that only 1.2 of those times has been automated tells me there, of course, are powers to take a very direct approach to instances of speech that incites violence or that incites hate, and I would call on our social media platforms of all variety to demonstrate the kind of responsibility that both lead to these events, and that includes those who perpetuate the messages in the aftermath. There's a lot of work that needs to be done.

**Media:** Has Facebook indicated to you that they've made moves in that direction?

**PM:** They've certainly indicated their—they've sent their condolences for New Zealand, they've indicated that they are working very proactively on the sharing of videos and content in the aftermath, and they've acknowledged some of the systems they have already around what they've termed "hate speech". My view is there's more that can and should be done.

**Media:** Are you starting to look into reports of people panic-buying firearms? Do you have any more details on that?

**PM:** No, no. I believe the police haven't been able to really verify that. I know that there was—I believe—an anecdotal suggestion of that. Look, all I would say is that I would exercise caution for anyone who was considering investing at this point. Simply wait a few more days, have some certainty.

**Media:** Deputy Prime Minister, have you spoken to the Australian Foreign Minister, Marise Payne, today?

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** I spoke to her the other day.

**Media:** And did she speak to you about their willingness to have a conversation about the deportation of Brenton Tarrant?

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** We didn't talk about that. We talked about their offer to provide us with every support, every effort they possibly could, alongside their feelings of sincere condolences about the tragedy that's happened in this terrorism disaster that happened here.

**Media:** And have you seen her reported comments today, either of you?

**PM:** No. Speaking for myself, I have not.

**Media:** The Turkish president—

**PM:** Sorry; if you don't mind, we'll just take Claire and then I'll come back to you.

**Media:** It's the same question.

**PM:** Oh, is it? Who would you prefer?

**Media:** The Turkish president has used some of the livestream in his election campaigning. Do you think that's acceptable?

**Rt Hon Winston Peters:** Look, I made it very clear to Vice President Oktay, and Cavusoglu, who is their Foreign Minister, just last night that anything of that nature that misrepresents this country, given that this was a non - New Zealand citizen, imperils the future and safety of the New Zealand people and our people abroad, and it's totally unfair. In short, we made it very clear that we oppose terrorism whatever shape and form it might

be and that we are for a free and open society. And we had a long dialogue on the need for any other country, or Turkey for that matter, to ensure that our country, New Zealand, was not misrepresented. We did not start or bring about this disaster and they totally understood that.

**Media:** Prime Minister, at the last IC meeting, Rebecca Kitteridge said the terror watch list had remained static at around 30. Has that changed?

**PM:** I haven't asked that specific question or received any alternative advice.

**Media:** Have you considered a national day of mourning, and also don't you think people want to see something this Friday?

**PM:** Oh, my apologies if I didn't make it clear—absolutely. There will be a national commemoration and a service held in order for all New Zealanders to gather together and acknowledge the terrorist attacks on Friday. That will absolutely be the case. What we want to ensure is that we allow the time and the space for families to be able to bury their loved ones, keeping in mind that some have not yet received their loved ones. So our concern was that this Friday may not have allowed some of that process on their side to be completed. So that's the decision; that's why it will not be this week. We are looking to set a date as soon as we can. I anticipate making announcements in that regard very soon. I just also want to make sure that I talk to the community in Christchurch and particularly the mayor and Christchurch City Council.

**Media:** Did Cabinet discuss at all the possibility of a moratorium on gun sales, on imports, while these last details are ironed out?

**PM:** Of course, we had a range of conversations around the implementation of our in-principle decision. I intend to make announcements on that in the very near future. And, as I've said, it will be before Cabinet meets next Monday.

**Media:** Muslim leaders have told us they've been warning the Government over and over for five years that they felt threatened and that nothing was done. Why wasn't more done to protect the Muslim community, and how will things change?

**PM:** I saw those reports and specifically have asked that question of our agencies. They acknowledge that those agencies have met the individual who has made those statements; that they have in the past had conversations around a perception around there being unfair targeting, and that's been the focus on some of those conversations. They've also given me the assurance that any specific issues that have been raised, any leads, any threats, have always been followed up on. However, it's not enough for me to simply pass on the assurances of our agencies under these circumstances, and that is why Cabinet has made the decision there will be an inquiry, and it will exist to look into this very issue, because the public deserves answers to those questions.

**Media:** Should there be a royal commission rather than just an inquiry?

**PM:** Yeah, so just to be—we haven't made the specific decision around the nature of the inquiry, so there are three options: royal commission, public inquiry, and ministerial inquiry. There's very few differences between the first two. The third one gives you a little more ability to manage timelines and a few more options around the management of classified information, but, actually, as I've said, what we'll be looking at when making a decision over the nature of the inquiry is timeliness, public confidence, and dealing with classified information. Those are some factors we need to keep in mind. Actually some of the critical elements, though, around the ability to look into these agencies exist across all three options.

**Media:** Because you were unable to come to post-Cab today with an announcement of any details of the in-principle decision that you've made—you're united, clearly, but does this suggest that there are differences at the Cabinet table over the details?

**PM:** No. No absolutely not. There isn't. Simply put, there's probably a reason it took Australia 12 days. I think the fact that we're here giving you now an assurance that we have

made a decision as a Cabinet; we're unified. There's simply details to work through. These aren't simple areas of law, and so that's simply what we'll be taking the time to get right.

**Media:** Will you be seeking Opposition support for what you're proposing?

**PM:** Certainly, my intention is for the Minister of Police to share, certainly, the intent of where we are heading—the decisions that Cabinet has made. And it will be up to them whether they choose to support or not. From the indications and reporting I've seen, from the conversations I've had with the Leader of the Opposition, I imagine they will be supportive.

**Media:** Gun City owner, David Tipple, said that he was seeking to meet with you. Have you received that request and would you be willing to talk to him?

**PM:** I haven't received the request. I don't know the nature of what he would like to talk about, but I consider all requests that come to me on a range of issues. But as I say, I haven't seen it. OK. Last couple of questions.

**Media:** Do you think that Christchurch has a problem with racism?

**PM:** I think what we have to acknowledge—the Deputy Prime Minister is absolutely right. You know, in this case, the primary suspect here, the person who has been arrested for this terrorist attack, was not a citizen of New Zealand. However, that is not to say that there are not those who live in New Zealand who hold values and ideas and use language that is completely counter to what the vast majority of New Zealanders believe. And so I don't think that we can ignore that; in fact, we cannot ignore that. If we're to continue to ensure the safety of our Muslim communities—and others; the 200 ethnicities that live in New Zealand—we have to be live to the fact that there are those who do not share our values of openness, of diversity, of compassion. And that's something we're going to have to confront as a nation.

**Media:** Prime Minister, some large advertisers—companies—are considering pulling their advertising from Google and Facebook. The Government, on industry figures, could be spending upwards of \$100 million a year on Google and Facebook. Is the Government looking at pulling advertising from them?

**PM:** You'll forgive me, Bernard, but this is just not an area that we've today invested some thinking and time into. We have been quite focused, still, on the operational issues—of course, decision making around policy changes, and so on. We've certainly raised our areas of concern around the spreading of message and videos, and so on, and we'll continue to do so, but we just simply haven't looked beyond that at this point. Look, I'll take the last question then.

**Media:** Did the Attorney-General regret the fact that he seemingly announced a ban on semi-automatic weapons on Saturday, and that announcement has gone around the world—hundreds and thousands of news articles and tweets, and caused a lot of confusion. Have you made your views clear with him?

**PM:** Ah, yes, I have spoken to him since then. All right. Thanks, everyone.

**conclusion of press conference**