

POST-CABINET PRESS CONFERENCE: MONDAY, 25 MARCH 2019

PM: Good afternoon, everyone. Let me first give you an overview of the coming days. Tomorrow, I am here in Wellington. On Wednesday, I will travel to Dunedin, where I will be meeting with the local Muslim community. On Thursday, I will head to Christchurch to meet with overseas delegations ahead of the national remembrance service on Friday, which, obviously, I will be attending.

I want to update you, though, on the Government's next steps in response to the Christchurch terrorist attack and our plans to keep New Zealand safe and to ensure that this never happens again. Last week, on 18 March, Cabinet agreed to establish an inquiry into the Christchurch mosques terror attack. Today, Cabinet agreed the inquiry will be a royal commission. While New Zealanders and Muslim communities around the world are both grieving and showing compassion for one another, they are also—quite rightly—asking questions on how this terror attack was able to happen here. This includes questions around the accessibility of semi-automatic weapons, the role social media has played generally, and the focus of the intelligence and security services. There are questions I too have asked and, of course, want answers to as well.

In short, the inquiry will look at what could have or should have been done to prevent the attack. It will inquire into the individual and his activities before the terrorist attack, including, of course, a look at agencies. It will look at the actions of the SIS, the GCSB, police, customs, immigration, and any other relevant Government departments or agencies.

In the next two weeks, the precise terms of reference will be finalised, including the lead for the royal commission and its duration. What I can say today is that there will be a focus on whether our intelligence community was concentrating its resources appropriately and whether there were any reports that could or should have alerted them to this attack. It is important that no stone is left unturned to get to the bottom of how this act of terrorism occurred, and what, if any, opportunities we had to stop it are included. In particular, as I've said many times before, I want recommendations on how any such attack in the future can be stopped.

I do want to say that royal commissions are usually reserved for matters of the gravest public importance, and it is clearly the appropriate form of inquiry for this instance.

I am pleased also to share with you today, though, that in the coming week, at the end of the week—on Sunday—I will be travelling to China. I will be in Beijing for meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang. I will also be formally opening the New Zealand embassy. This was a visit that was planned some weeks ago, but given the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, I have cut it back to one day of meetings. This is an important visit. New Zealand places a high priority on our relationship with China. Our businesses value the relationships they have, and I do look forward to our ongoing engagement. I expect discussions will include a broad range of bilateral, regional, and international issues of common interests, including on upgrading our free-trade agreement, protecting and promoting a rules-based international trading system, and combating climate change.

Through the terrorist attack in Christchurch, we've been served with a tragic reminder that New Zealand is no more immune than other members of our global community to the problem and, indeed, divisions facing humanity. China is an important regional and global actor, with whom we must work on challenges facing the global community and those critical to the security and prosperity of our region.

I have with me today the Deputy Prime Minister to answer any questions on our international response to the Christchurch terrorist attacks and, indeed, his visit to Turkey and Indonesia, or indeed any other questions on foreign policy matters.

Media: Prime Minister, on China, was it a difficult balancing act for you to decide whether to go or not?

PM: Look, certainly, for me, the immediate response, of course, given that we already had this trip in train and planned, was immediately that it did need to be scaled back. It was intended to be a longer visit, including a business delegation, and under the circumstances, that just didn't seem appropriate. I do want to acknowledge that our hosts, China, had been incredibly accommodating of those needs.

Media: Which other Ministers were scheduled to go with you, if any?

PM: Look, I had scheduled for other Ministers to join me. It was going to be an appropriately high-level delegation, particularly given that we would have a business delegation with us. My expectation now, given that David Parker does have an impending visit in April, will be that he will use that opportunity to lead a business delegation.

Media: But is it appropriate to leave New Zealand at all at the moment?

PM: That is why I have trimmed it back to a one-day visit. So, essentially, I travel on Sunday; I have a one-day visit on Monday; I'm back in New Zealand on Tuesday. That is a decision I made, to scale it right back from what had been a visit involving three cities to just one day, because it didn't feel appropriate for me to be any longer, at this point.

Media: How did China take that?

PM: They have been incredibly accommodating, acknowledging the circumstances, and we're, of course, very grateful for that. And, again, as I say: literally 24 hours and travelling with as little time away as is possible.

Media: Prime Minister, on the royal commission, you say it will focus on the intelligence agencies. Will it also look at the police?

PM: As I've mentioned, I did explicitly mention that they are one of the agencies that we're including. We will be looking at events leading up to the attack, rather than the response—the immediate emergency and first responders' response to the attack. That's work that I think needs to be done, but we'll do that separately. But as I've said: the SIS, the GCSB, police, customs, immigration, any other relevant Government agencies. We are still finalising the terms of reference, but Cabinet has been clear about the level of which they intend this inquiry to be.

Media: Are our surveillance laws at the moment too soft?

PM: Are our surveillance laws at the moment too soft? Look, one of the questions that we need to answer is whether or not we could or should have known more. New Zealand is not a surveillance State, and that's been a very clear directive, I think, from members of the public, but questions, of course, need to be answered around whether or not this was the activities of an individual that we could or should have known about. The agencies themselves are welcoming independent oversight and investigation into that very question.

Media: Royal commissions do tend to take a long time. Is there a risk, by escalating it to that level, that we won't get answers soon enough?

PM: Look, you're absolutely right. We've got to weigh up here the seriousness of the attack and the need for people to have confidence of its independence with also their desire for there to be answers in a timely way. One way that we can try and ensure that that happens is in the way that the terms of reference are crafted, and also the scale of the group of inquiries. So those are all things we're factoring in. We want it to be independent, we want it to be at the highest level, but we do also want it to be timely.

Media: When would you like it to be able to report back? When will we get those answers?

PM: I've had some early indications, but I want to reserve giving some time lines until we've been able to finalise those terms of reference. But I absolutely accept that people

want answers and they don't want to be left waiting a long time, but we equally have to allow the time for the inquiry to do the job properly. So we're weighing all of that up.

Media: On social media—Twitter, in particular—there's still auto-playing videos of the attack being shared. Have you reached out to Twitter and other social platforms in recent days, and what are you expecting them to do, like, in the immediate term?

PM: Yeah. We've had proactive contact. I couldn't give you explicit information around the detail of that from individual companies, but we have been receiving information, particularly from Facebook, around the efforts that they have made to have the video removed. It is fair to say that we, of course, see it as unacceptable that this continues to be available on social media platforms. That's widely known amongst those social media leadership—our views on that matter. There is work still here to be done. This afternoon, I will join other Ministers in meeting with Brad Smith, the Microsoft chief legal officer, also involved with the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism. That will be the beginning of many conversations which New Zealand intends to very much be a part of.

Media: Will you call for banning livestreaming altogether until it can be properly managed on these sites?

PM: Look, I think it's obvious that in this case—I mean, we've seen not only the use of livestreaming that goes against even the community standards that Facebook themselves set. So my question generally, across all of these platforms, is: what can we put in place or have assurances around ensuring that this doesn't happen again? Those are, rightly, the questions we should be asking.

Media: [*Inaudible*] response, though, has been to ask people to report the videos. I mean, I reported some yesterday and they're still there now. Is that an acceptable level of response from them?

PM: Look, from—I can't answer specifically from Twitter. I would say, "No, I don't think that's an effective way of managing what is incredibly disturbing content." Certainly from other providers, we've had assurance that they are proactively looking to remove it. So it was some days ago, but at that time, Facebook were reporting 1.5 million times that that video had been removed, and not all of that was automated. But, again, I think—I'm sure—in fact, I would be surprised if there wasn't consensus among those platforms that the proliferation of that video is just unacceptable. We just want them to be more proactive in its removal.

Media: Can I ask Mr Peters about his meeting with President Erdogan? Were you disappointed afterwards that he went out in a very short space of time and showed video of the shooting?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Well, the facts are that the showing after that meeting was an abbreviated version where his narrative had utterly changed, so that whereas before we left, his narrative had been condemnatory of New Zealand and Australia all in together, that all changed dramatically with his statement to the *Washington Post* and the speech he made at the OIC praising New Zealand's behaviour and, in particular, the example set by the Prime Minister, which could not have been a bigger change. In respect to the question of the tape, we had already spoken to the Turkish embassy in New Zealand before I even left about our concern about that, and so my focus was to ensure the safety of New Zealanders travelling in Turkey in the future, particularly with Anzac Day coming up. So, in that sense, I'm delighted with the response and the assurance he gave me personally.

Media: Was it a combative conversation?

Peters: No, but I did point out to him that any view that we were a white supremacist country should be put to rest, and I gave him the reasons why, and he accepted it, gave me an assurance that our young people in particular would be as safe as they always have been for decades, and he then expressed his desire to come to New Zealand.

Media: What specific assurances did you give to the president that New Zealand isn't a white supremacist nation?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Well, I said there is no Cabinet in the whole world as ethnically diverse as the New Zealand Cabinet, and if he wanted evidence of that, I'm happy to show him.

PM: And I think, also, some of the feedback that I think both the Deputy Prime Minister and myself have received in calls from the international community has actually not just been the response from politicians but, actually, the response of the New Zealand public. Those leaders have seen the images of New Zealanders turning out in their thousands at vigils. They've seen the images of flowers laid at the gates of mosques, the spontaneous gathering of students in support of those affected. They have seen all of those images internationally, and that has sent a message around New Zealanders' grief alongside the members of the Muslim community.

Media: Is it acceptable for President Erdogan to show any part of his livestream video in any context at all?

PM: We've already shared our view on that. That has gone directly to their representatives here in New Zealand, as the Deputy Prime Minister has said. We continue to maintain absolutely the same view on the video, whether it's social media providers, whether it's other countries. We have a clear view on that, but also one of the things we were seeking assurance around was, of course, the safety of New Zealanders in Turkey, particularly leading up to Gallipoli commemorations.

Media: What is your clear view—can you just express that again?

PM: Oh, that video, you know, should not be shared. It is harmful content, and that's been our clear and stated position, and that was stated clearly before the Deputy Prime Minister even left.

Media: Was it a mistake, though, not to share that directly with the president face to face?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: The president already knew it. The president had already, before I began to talk to him, shifted his dialogue. That's proven by the *Washington Post* article—not one, but two. And so, you know, I was looking at the big picture—57 Islamic countries, where things could go so wrong, and there never has been such a meeting of the OIC making this request of a country where there has been such universal praise for the country in question. You had to be there to believe it, and when we showed them the video, a number of them were weeping and sobbing at the demonstration of non-Muslim New Zealand towards the Muslim victims in this case. So it was a dramatic event in that sense, and I was told by countless Ministers that they've never seen any meeting of that type in the OIC since they were members of it.

Media: Is it disappointing that you had to travel to Turkey in the first place to deal with this?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Well, I was asked by the Turks—by the Turkish delegation here, when they first arrived—to come. And I spoke to the Prime Minister. It was clear to us that we had no option but to turn up and set the record straight. I took Jenny Salesa, Minister Salesa, with me as well to show that we were serious about a Cabinet, and a governmental, and a national response. And she'll confirm my impression; we were there.

PM: I think—I agree with the judgment of the Deputy Prime Minister that us being present for that meeting was incredibly important, to voice our view on what had happened on New Zealand soil, and the work, of course, that we need to continue to do, but the view of New Zealanders in the wake of the terrorist attack here. And so I think it was important that we were present, and I'm very pleased the Deputy Prime Minister suggested that we be there.

Media: Mr Peters, while his rhetoric may have changed, his actions in showing the video didn't, did it?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Well, yes, they did because he's not showing—

Media: I've just seen it.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: No, but he's not showing the same length of video. There are blurred parts of it now where New Zealand has been taken out. You can't deny that it mentions the fact that it was Christchurch, but thereafter his personal rhetoric around the video has utterly changed. There's no mention of New Zealand any more.

Media: Are you saying that it's OK that he's showing the video at all?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I'm not saying that at all. We made that very clear before I left. As the Prime Minister said—

Media: But he's still showing excerpts of the video.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Yes, but not the same length as it was, and the narrative that he had alongside of it has dramatically changed where my country, or our country, is concerned.

Media: Have there been subsequent requests to Mr Erdogan not to play the video?

PM: I don't think we've been in direct contact since the Deputy Prime Minister has returned.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: I just got home.

PM: Yeah, and, of course, we've only just seen that that's continued. But, look, keeping in mind, of course, we've been clear on the video—absolutely. Before the visit, after the visit—we maintain absolutely the same position. But there has been a definitive difference in the statements that have been made around New Zealand's role in this terrorist attack, the perception of New Zealand around the attack, and, also, the safety of New Zealanders. We needed to gain assurances around the ongoing safety of New Zealanders travelling in Turkey, and that's been received.

Media: Some people are saying—some free speech advocates are saying—that banning the manifesto—the Chief Censor's action is a step too far. Do you have a view on it?

PM: Ultimately, the decision's for the Chief Censor, but if I were to have an opinion, I would say that it was the right decision.

Media: Prime Minister, do you plan to raise the persecution of the Uighurs Muslims when you're in China?

PM: I tend to give general topics when I—before I go into meetings and then answer more specific questions when I come out of them, so happy to engage at that level again. It's fair to say I have raised the issue before, and I have raised human rights issues before.

Media: So do you plan to, in the current climate and given what's recently happened?

PM: I actually haven't sat down and gone through my intent over bilateral, but given I've raised it before, that should give you an indication.

Media: What about foreign party donations, given it's such an issue for us here in New Zealand?

PM: Well, I don't think that they've come directly from Premier Li or the President, so—

Media: I understand that China isn't too happy with the talk in New Zealand about banning foreign donations—

PM: Again, as I say, I intend to work through exactly the position that I take in the lead-up to the coming days. I'm happy to answer detailed questions after I've sat down in

those bilaterals. At the moment though, I've given some very broad indications, but almost always there's some discussion around human rights issues.

Media: Are you hoping to extend the brief—the upgrade to the free trade deal? Are you hoping to get something concrete out of that, or will there not be time, given it's only one day?

PM: Look, it's been part of—the last time I met with Premier Li it was subject of conversation. Of course, we take those opportunities to have conversations about our economic and trading relationships, and I expect it will be no different. Obviously, the substantive work is always done by our officials, but we do tend to touch on the progress that we're making in those bilaterals.

Media: Mr Peters, the Turkish Vice-President and Foreign Minister were on the ground in Christchurch within 48 hours of the attack. Was there any consultation with the New Zealand Government from the Turks before they flew here? Because they were using up a lot of police resources, just two days after the attack, on the ground in Christchurch.

Rt Hon Winston Peters: Yes, there was. They said they were coming.

Media: Was it appropriate for them to be here so soon?

Peters: Well, look, that's for the Turkish Government to decide, as it would be for any country to decide. Some have come later, and the immediacy of the event—especially in a Muslim circumstance—would justify that.

Media: Prime Minister, do you think that the NZSIS has been too focused on Islamic extremism?

PM: Look, as I've said repeatedly, of course, that is an area where they highlighted to me in the aftermath of this situation the work that they had been doing over the last nine months, given what they had seen occurring at a global level. But they themselves welcome the opportunity of a royal commission to look more deeply at what could or should have been known in the case of the Christchurch mosque attacks.

Media: The Human Rights Foundation has put out a report in which a number of Muslims said they felt unfairly targeted by those agencies. Have you got that sense from them, being around the Muslim community over the last week or so?

PM: Yeah, and, actually, to be frank, the conversations I've had with the Muslim community hasn't necessarily, but I want to acknowledge that sometimes those have been in the public space, so that may not have been the appropriate place for them to raise concern. So I don't want to take that as being indicative, necessarily. What I do want to say, though, is that the way that the NZSIS conducts itself is very much governed by protocol and law. They are required to follow policy statements that are publicly available. If individuals feel that they have breached that, they should absolutely raise that with the Inspector-General. That is an appropriate way to make sure that the work that has been undertaken by the SIS is done appropriately. There is no need to wait for that. If any member of the community has concerns, they should directly raise those issues.

Media: Royal commissions of inquiry tend to take years—well, they have in the past. Have set any expectations around time lines? Can we afford to wait that long for that if it's going to be as long for spy agencies—?

PM: Yeah, again, I wouldn't want to see a situation where we were talking years. Again, I do want to reserve the ability—once we've set the terms of reference—to look at what is a reasonable expectation of delivery, but I absolutely hear the expectation from the New Zealand public that this is delivered independently, that it's thorough, but that it's also timely.

Media: What are the top two or three questions you'd like answered from a royal commission?

PM: I've already outlined some of them today. But, obviously, the questions that are being raised by the public around our intelligence services—whether they were adequately looking into these areas or could or should have known of the activities of the individual who undertook the terrorist attack. Those, obviously, will be included in the royal commission.

Media: [*Inaudible*] address claims in the media that you nodded off during an OIC meeting?

Rt Hon Winston Peters: This is amazing. I've got a full list of everybody that spoke, where they came from, in the order they spoke—it's comprehensive and I've still got it. And as someone suggested, you can be in deep contemplation and know what's going on at the same time—which I was. I thought it was a very, very serious meeting, and that's why I've kept record of it.

Media: Prime Minister, would you ever allow a mass surveillance programme like Project Speargun in New Zealand?

PM: Look, I've had that programme raised—well, I've heard it raised in the public domain. I don't know whether or not that's been raised because there's an assumption that that somehow would have led to more knowledge around what led up to the terrorist attack in Christchurch. That actually may not have been the case, because my understanding of Project Speargun is that it was a cyber-security initiative, rather than, maybe, what is being implied.

Media: Any update on a gun register or gun buy-back programme?

PM: Yes. So today Cabinet did discuss some of the detail around the legislation that is proposed to be debated in the next session of Parliament. There was a general conversation around the additional work that needs to be done. Obviously, we've prioritised the legislation banning assault rifles and military-style semi-automatics. We have asked for extra work to be done, and police have recommended additional work be done, around issues of licencing; around the issue and question of a register. We've not yet made final decisions there because we're still awaiting additional advice from police.

Media: And the gun buy-back?

PM: Obviously, that will sit in tandem to the legislation, and we expect that the details for that will be worked through to sit alongside the final legislation.

Media: Do you expect that urgent work on guns will push back other major Government priorities like the policies of the Taxing Working Group [*Inaudible*] the mental health inquiry—?

PM: Look, not where there hasn't been direct involvement from agencies that are working on other areas. So tax: no, it's my expectation those time lines will remain the same. Mental health: there has been a draw on agencies there, so that is an area where we may yet see a small change in timetables, but yet to see that finally.

Media: Do you expect any changes to Budget announcements, in that case?

PM: No.

Media: In the UK, a group has reported a 500 percent increase in Islamophobic hate crimes following Christchurch. Have you had any briefings that would suggest there have been an uptick here?

PM: No. I've seen the reporting and, of course, the plea that I would make is anyone who has been a subject of any threats, please report that to police. If you've seen any information that you think our intelligence services should know, please report it. They are taking them seriously. They are following them up. I think it's devastating to know that when a community has been the subject of a direct attack like this, that they would then be subject to threats. I think that's utterly despicable.

Media: Have you instructed any Government agencies to reach out to the owners of the website 8chan, which the *Washington Post* was reporting looked like a terrorist-approved website, in the wake of the Christchurch attacks?

PM: Yeah, and we are, as a Cabinet, having a conversation around meaningful change in the area of social media. So I am expecting further advice in that area. As I've said before, I'm not interested in a PR exercise. I want to ensure that what we seek is meaningful change, and there are a range of different areas where I think we should be doing a bit of exploratory work. It's not just for New Zealand, though. We do need a global push because these are global platforms.

Media: Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister said in Turkey that—

PM: Yep, I'll take the last two questions.

Media: The Foreign Minister said in Turkey that the alleged gunman would spend the rest of his life in a New Zealand jail. Does this mean you've ruled out extraditing the alleged gunman?

PM: No, no. No final decisions have been made in that regard, but I can absolutely say that he will face the New Zealand justice system.

Media: Prime Minister, will—

PM: Yes, last question.

Media: Will the Government look into the death penalty after this terrorist attack?

PM: No. OK, thank you everyone.