



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs**

On 6 December 2021, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Nanaia Mahuta under CAB-21-SUB-0518 on her travel, from 11 to 28 November 2021, to Australia, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, the United States of America, and Canada.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Proactively Released by the
Minister of Foreign Affairs

[In Confidence]

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Australia, Indonesia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, United States of America and Canada from 11 to 28 November 2021, my first official visit abroad in my capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This group of countries and the sequencing of my visit was deliberate to reinforce our outlook for the Indo-Pacific, foreshadow our ongoing interest in diversified relationships and to reinforce our trusted engagement with traditional partners.

Report

Aotearoa New Zealand – Independent, Principled and Engaged

- 1 The key objective of my visit was to affirm to the international community that Aotearoa New Zealand remains an independent, principled and engaged international actor. The range of countries visited, and the wide variety of meetings (seven Foreign Ministers; the President of Indonesia; the Secretary-General of ASEAN; and six ministers from other portfolios) provided a platform from which to project our unique perspective within a number of key relationships.
- 2 Across all countries I was able to assert and advance New Zealand interests; to articulate our posture/approach on a range of key issues^{s6(a)} and to reaffirm New Zealand's highly principled approach to international engagements, rooted in our values.

The value of kanohi ki te kanohi diplomacy

- 3 My travel unequivocally confirmed the value of face-to-face diplomacy. While virtual diplomacy has allowed us to continue to maintain contact with the world (and, through APEC, provided a platform to successfully host a major international summit), it is no substitute for meetings in person.
- 4 Kanohi ki te kanohi meetings allows for richer, more engaged discussions. Sitting across the table from your counterpart, whether in a formal meeting and/or over a meal, allows you to truly connect with your counterpart; to detect and explore nuances which are only apparent in person; to build trust; and, in some cases, to establish a powerful personal connection which can be built on (and drawn on) in future encounters.
- 5 My experience on this visit has underlined the importance of face-to-face diplomacy; the importance of New Zealand being present at key international

meetings; and engaging with important partners. My Ministry has provided formal advice on a travel programme for the Prime Minister and me in 2022, s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i)

Travelling in the COVID-19 pandemic

- 6 Travelling during the COVID-19 pandemic is significantly different to my earlier experience of travelling as a Minister. For example:
- By the time I am out of MIQ in New Zealand, I will have had 15 COVID tests;
 - I was the first foreign minister to visit Australia and Canada since the pandemic was declared in early 2020;
 - Masking, proof of vaccination and proof of recent negative COVID tests were required at all times throughout the visit;
 - Airports in New Zealand, Australia, Singapore and Canada were noticeably empty; whereas in the UAE, Qatar and the United States, international travel numbers are relatively stronger;
 - “Getting stuff done” is significantly more challenging. Many hotels and other service providers have cut back to the bare necessities; and arranging meetings, movements and other logistics now has a whole added layer of complexity due to staff cuts and/or regulations/requirements to meet local COVID-control settings. New Zealand’s Embassies and High Commissions throughout my visit had developed excellent programmes for me – but the impost of the pandemic on their planning, organisation and delivery was evident at every stop.
- 7 The visit was also a great opportunity to assess how other countries are managing to “live with COVID”. A key enabler, from my experience, was the confidence which a good testing regime can provide. In some countries, tests were being turned around within a couple of hours (e.g. NSW can now turn around PCR tests from the airport within one hour), and tests are widely available at many locations (including by mobile clinics which will test at your home or hotel). I observed that this level of testing – and the capacity to get quick results - provides a level of assurance which then allows a level of normality across government, commerce, and society more generally.

Foreign Policy, Trade and Development Outcomes

- 8 Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ reporting provides a detailed account of my discussions and outcomes from each destination on my visit. However, I thought it useful to focus on some key themes and outcomes from the visit.
- Strategic competition in the **Indo-Pacific** was a key point of discussion throughout my visit, ^{s6(a)}

s6(a)

I confirmed New Zealand's strong and enduring interests in the region; asserted the principles we want to see underpinning the region (in line with the Prime Minister's 14 July speech); and underlined our commitment to working with partners to maintain a region based on the rule of law, sovereignty, inclusivity, open markets, and ASEAN centrality.

- There was widespread interest in New Zealand's perspective on, and our approach to, **the Pacific**. I was able to build understanding of the shift in our diplomatic approach to a focus on the region's resilience; to emphasise the profound significance of climate change across the region; to build awareness of the economic crisis facing many countries in the region; ^{s6(a)}

to point out that COVID-19 has accelerated and amplified these trends; and the consequent importance of like-minded countries working together to do more, with closer coordination and consultation, to maintain a region where New Zealand's interests and influence are safeguarded ^{s6(a)}

^{s6(a)}

point of discussion, ^{s6(a)}

discussions provided many hooks for follow-up by officials, ^{s6(a)}

^{s6(a)}

was another key

My

- **Afghanistan** was another key focus throughout my visit, particularly (but not only) during my meetings in the Gulf. ^{s6(a)}

^{s6(a)}

- I was also able to see first-hand the support which Qatar is providing for the **safe passage of New Zealanders and at risk Afghans** who have the right to resettle in New Zealand. ^{s6(a)}

^{s6(a)}

s6(a)

- I was also able to advance **New Zealand trade/economic interests** throughout my visit. In Australia, Singapore and Indonesia, I was able to confirm New Zealand's commitment to working with partners to maintain open channels of commerce notwithstanding the challenges presented by COVID. US economic engagement with the Indo-Pacific was another key theme – in Washington DC. ^{s6(a)}
s6(a)

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

s6(a), s6(b)(i)

s6(a)

s9(2)(g)(i), s9(2)(f)(iv)

- My visit to the UAE also allowed me to observe first-hand the \$63 million investment the New Zealand government has made in the **Dubai Expo 2020**. The New Zealand pavilion is impressive, and notwithstanding the impacts of COVID 19 (which saw the entire Expo delayed by a year), our pavilion is attracting a good amount of foot traffic (to date, over 250,000 visitors have visited the New Zealand pavilion – by way of contrast, the Saudi pavilion – one of the most popular – clocked over one million visitors during my visit). The pavilion is designed around the story of the Whanganui awa, and goes on to run a multimedia story showcasing New Zealand's natural beauty, our value as a source of safe, high quality food and beverages, and our prowess in a number of science and technology. The pavilion is also designed in such a way so as to provide a platform for broader NZ Inc. engagement – for example, it has a popular restaurant (open to the public), plus meeting and entertaining spaces which can be used for receptions, formal meetings, working lunches, and so on. This means the pavilion has proven to be a great space to promote our economic interests and 22 New Zealand businesses have hosted events and dinners in the first two months as part of the wider leveraging programme. During my visit I also hosted a lunch at the New Zealand pavilion for its "care collective" sponsors (e.g. Fonterra and Zespri), and functions were also held for participants from the Te Aratini festival, and broader NZ Inc representatives. ^{s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i)}

- The Expo also provided a platform for **Te Aratini** – a Festival of Indigenous and Tribal Ideas that ran from 17 - 19 November during Expo 2020 Dubai's Tolerance and Inclusivity Week. This inaugural event focussed on fostering a deeper understanding of indigenous peoples' world views and the converging roles of culture, commerce, community, and conservation in the protection, maintenance and resurgence of the world's indigenous tribal economies. Over 50 speakers and performers attended the event in person from the UAE, Australia, Canada, the United States, Malaysia, Paraguay, and Panama. Delegates also participated online via pre-recorded content and over live stream through Expo's social media platforms. I officially opened the forum, participated in the closing ceremony, and engaged with the content and delegates throughout. New Zealand's delegation including Māori & Pacific leaders, academics and speakers such as Ngahiwi Tomoana, Mavis Mullins, Shane Taurima, Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr, Jamie Tuuta, Billie Jo Hohepa-Ropiha, and Hinemoa Elder. Iwi leaders hope to build a strong and lasting legacy off the back of this initial event, including the possibility of convening another event at a future EXPO, or on the margins of another similar group.

s9(2)(f)(iv), s9(2)(g)(i)

- My visit also provided an opportunity to showcase the importance of **Aotearoa New Zealand's bicultural values, their importance to the way we conduct our foreign relationships and our unique relationship to Te Tiriti o Waitangi**. This approach delivered clear dividends, including through the relationships we were able to forge with the Aboriginal communities in Australia's Blue Mountains; the way Indonesia's Foreign Minister opened our formal meeting with a mihi delivered in Te Reo; hugely rich policy discussions with counterparts in Canada; and the deep connections which I was able to make with counterparts – particularly in the Middle East but also in Canada – through the presentation of taonga which established an emotional bond to Aotearoa New Zealand. The perspectives and discussions relating to Māori and indigenous peoples intersected with how other countries were thinking about (a) inclusive and sustainable economic recovery where indigenous economic inclusion can support broader well-being outcomes; (b) truth and reconciliation and a genuine interest in the Aotearoa New Zealand perspective drawing on the Treaty of Waitangi, our Treaty settlement process and broader evolution of our public policy approach; and (c) Traditional Knowledge and revitalisation of culture and language as an important pillar to improve outcomes for indigenous peoples.

9 My visit also allowed us to advance interests across a much wider range of issues, ^{s6(a), s9(2)(f)(iv)}

- 10 I was also struck by the professionalism and commitment of our officials abroad. Many of our officials and their families have had harrowing experiences with the COVID pandemic, including up to 18 months of lockdown (with all the pressures that puts on people and families), an inability to conduct in-person diplomacy, and the consequent struggle to keep New Zealand interests on the radar of host governments. Officials from MFAT – but also a wide range of NZ Inc agencies across our posts – warmly welcomed the opportunity which my visit provided for them to reengage with host governments at the highest level, and in many cases, to facilitate the first in-person introduction for our Heads of Mission with their host Foreign Ministers and/or senior officials. The value of Ministerial travel at this particular time is thus amplified by the door opening and connections that can be made for the first time since the COVID pandemic.
- 11 Finally, I was also struck by how positively Aotearoa New Zealand is perceived across the world, including for our management of the COVID pandemic, our response to the Christchurch terrorist attacks, and the way we conduct our diplomacy – independent, principled, and engaged. The visit was timely; impactful; and an essential first step of in-person international engagement which will broaden and deepen over the coming year.

Proactive release

- 12 This paper will be proactively released as per Cabinet Office Circular CO(18)4 on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade's website. Proactive release is subject to redactions as appropriate under the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendation

I recommend that Cabinet note this report.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Minister of Foreign Affairs