



Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs**

On 25 July 2022, Cabinet **noted** the report from Hon Nanaia Mahuta under CAB-22-SUB-0274 on her travel, from 19 to 28 June 2022, to Kigali, Rwanda to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

Rachel Hayward
Acting Secretary of the Cabinet

PROACTIVELY RELEASED BY THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

[RESTRICTED]

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

Chair, Cabinet

Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta: Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, June 2022

Proposal

- 1 I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Kigali, Rwanda for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). This was my fourth overseas visit in my capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 2 Attending CHOGM demonstrated Aotearoa New Zealand as a committed and constructive member of the Commonwealth, and was a valuable opportunity to meet with a number of counterparts and leaders from the Commonwealth's diverse membership.

Report

- 3 On behalf of the Prime Minister, I attended the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) from 21 – 25 June, 2022 in Kigali (Rwanda). Hosted by the Rwandan Government, the (usually) biennial meeting is the most important event in the Commonwealth calendar and sets the scope of the organisation's work. This was the first CHOGM held in four years – as the 2020 CHOGM was postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 4 As it is usual practice for Aotearoa New Zealand to be represented by both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs at CHOGM, there was a strong need to prioritise attendance at elements of the CHOGM programme and sessions for leaders that covered New Zealand's core interests (climate change, biodiversity, Russia/Ukraine).
- 5 CHOGM presented a valuable opportunity to connect with leaders and foreign ministers from across the 54 members of the Commonwealth. These connections are a key value that we derive from our membership. In total I met formally with thirteen counterparts and leaders from across all regions of the Commonwealth.
- 6 I also hosted a lunch for Pacific Prime Ministers, Ministers and Heads of delegation present in Kigali, as well as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretary-General. The lunch was attended by all Pacific delegations to CHOGM and was a valuable opportunity to hear and discuss our unique Pacific-centric perspectives on Commonwealth issues ahead of the formal CHOGM meetings, as well as regional issues. I also took this opportunity to reiterate to Samoan Prime Minister Mata'afa New Zealand's offer to support Samoa in their hosting of CHOGM in 2024.

7 s6(a) There are numerous regional and multilateral groups and the Commonwealth risks losing support from leaders if its value proposition is not clear. I raised this concern with counterparts and leaders during the week and shared our desire to see the Commonwealth Secretariat focus on areas where it has a unique or niche advantage over other organisations in order to be more effective (such as promoting human rights, the rule of law, election monitoring and strengthening democratic institutions). I reiterated these points on the floor of the formal meeting.

8 Detailed notes from the bilateral meetings, including areas for follow-up, have been circulated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's formal message system. This report discusses the visit's objectives, highlights key outcomes, and also provides some insights into attending my first in-person large-scale multilateral meeting since COVID.

Aotearoa New Zealand – a committed and constructive member of the Commonwealth

9 My experience at CHOGM reaffirmed the Commonwealth's value as a forum for promoting support for the international rules-based system, climate change, oceans, upholding universal human rights, and protecting and promoting democracy and good governance. It also underscored the importance of in-person meetings for both relationship building and ensuring our voice is heard on issues of global significance.

10 Climate change and the war on Ukraine were two issues that presented particular challenges during the negotiations of the CHOGM 2022 Communiqué outcome document.

11 In both these difficult areas of negotiation, New Zealand demonstrated itself as an engaged and constructive member of the Commonwealth, brokering compromise text through working groups and engaging across the breadth of the Commonwealth membership, not just with traditional like-minded partners, to find commonality and a way forward.

Deepening bilateral links across the Commonwealth

12 CHOGM week demonstrated the key value of the Commonwealth - as a diverse network that enables New Zealand to build and strengthen relationships with a range of countries, in particular those in Africa and the Caribbean.

13 During the course of the week I had dedicated meetings with:

13.1 Rwanda: President Paul Kagame

13.2 Australia: Minister for International Development and the Pacific Pat Conroy

13.3 Belize: Minister of Foreign Affairs Eamon Courtenay

- 13.4 Ghana: Cabinet Secretary for Foreign Affairs Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey
- 13.5 India: Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanyam Jaishankar
- 13.6 Jamaica: Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade Kamina Johnson Smith
- 13.7 Kenya: Minister of Foreign Affairs Raychelle Omamo
- 13.8 Pakistan: Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Hina Rabbani Khar
- 13.9 Sierra Leone: Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation David J. Francis
- 13.10 Singapore: Minister of Foreign Affairs Vivian Balakrishnan
- 13.11 Solomon Islands: Minister of Foreign Affairs Jeremiah Manele
- 13.12 Sri Lanka: Minister of Foreign Affairs Gamini Lakshman Peiris
- 13.13 UK: Foreign Secretary Liz Truss.
- 14 In all of these engagements, I was able to build the profile of Aotearoa New Zealand, to assert and advance our bilateral and multilateral interests, to articulate our approach on a range of key global issues (e.g. the security and humanitarian situation in the Ukraine, impacts on food security and global supply chains) and highlight New Zealand's expertise and perspectives. s6(a) s6(a)
- 15 The value of the Commonwealth as a forum for deepening engagement with countries with whom we otherwise have limited direct interaction will continue. Togo and Gabon's applications for Commonwealth membership were approved by the membership, expanding the Commonwealth family to 56 countries (21 of which are in Africa).
- Re-appointment of the Secretary General and looking ahead to CHOGM 2024*
- 16 Another key outcome of CHOGM leaders meetings was the re-appointment of Secretary-General Patricia Scotland. Scotland has been appointed an additional two years before a new Secretary-General is appointed at CHOGM 2024 in Samoa. The Commonwealth membership had to confront the principle of regional rotation of the role of the Commonwealth Secretary General.
- 17 The contentious sessions to resolve the issue of the Secretary-General appointment was an unwelcome distraction from discussions on global issues and the strategic direction of the Commonwealth itself. Samoa hosting CHOGM 2024 provides an opportunity to deliver a fresh, more focused and impactful CHOGM including a more focused outcome document. Officials

have begun engagement with Samoa on how we can best support them in this effort.

Aotearoa New Zealand's role in Rwanda

- 18 On my last day I also had the opportunity to visit a New Zealand International Development Cooperation-funded e-motorbike charging station. It was valuable to meet a New Zealander doing business in Rwanda and who is leading the way in establishing a network of e-motorbikes in Africa.
- 19 I also had the opportunity to pay my respects at the Genocide Memorial in Kigali before I returned back to Aotearoa. This allowed our delegation the opportunity to reflect on the development journey of this country that has experienced much tragedy and hardship. New Zealand's efforts in response to the genocide, while serving on the UN Security Council, is well remembered in Rwanda.

COVID-19 settings

- 20 My return also coincided with New Zealand's removal of COVID-19 pre-departure testing requirements. We were required to abide by Rwanda's testing requirements in order to participate in CHOGM (as well as additional protocols the New Zealand delegation imposed on itself).
- 21 COVID-19 did see a number of delegations have to withdraw representatives during the week which is a reminder that while we are reconnecting New Zealand with the world, COVID-19 will continue to impact us for the foreseeable future and it is not a 'return to normal' as we know it. COVID protocols such as mask wearing are not always strictly adhered to, and I note that we will need to constantly adjust our health and safety approaches.

Proactive Release

- 22 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 redaction 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 / Minita Take Aorere