

# Proactive Release

Date: 4 May 2022

The following Cabinet paper[s] and related Cabinet minute[s] have been proactively released by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<i>Report on Overseas Travel – Hon Nanaia Mahuta 19 February 2 March Europe</i>	
<i>Minute of Decision: Report on Overseas Travel – Hon Nanaia Mahuta 19 February to 2 March Europe</i>	CAB-21-MIN-0065

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- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the New Zealand Government;
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- 9(2)(ba)(ii): to protect information where the making available of information would be likely otherwise to damage the public interest; and
- 9(2)(j): to avoid prejudice to negotiations.



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### Report on Overseas Travel: Hon Nanaia Mahuta

**Portfolio**                      **Foreign Affairs**

On 14 March 2022, Cabinet **noted** the report attached to CAB-22-SUB-0065 from Hon Nanaia Mahuta on her travel from 19 February to 2 March 2022 to:

- 1.1 Paris, France, to participate in the Indo-Pacific Forum;
- 1.2 London, the United Kingdom, for bilateral discussions;
- 1.3 Geneva, Switzerland, for bilateral discussions.

Michael Webster  
Secretary of the Cabinet

Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Chair, Cabinet

**REPORT TO CABINET: MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS' VISIT TO PARIS,  
LONDON & GENEVA: 19 FEBRUARY-2 MARCH 2022**

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Europe, my second in my capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The visit to France, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, occurring at a time of significant regional tension, enabled me to have informed and frank discussions with counterparts, and reaffirm that Aotearoa New Zealand remains an independent, principled, and engaged partner. With the rules based order upon which we rely increasingly under strain, most starkly manifest in Russia's invasion of Ukraine, this visit underscored the importance of us continuing to articulate who we are and what we value in concert with those who share our commitment to open, democratic societies.

**Report**

I undertook my second official visit abroad in my capacity as the Minister of Foreign Affairs from 19 February through 2 March 2022.

My itinerary over this period took me to Paris (France), London (the United Kingdom), and Geneva (Switzerland).

The character of diplomacy in each city was quite different. The first stop in Paris centred on a high-level, EU-hosted Indo-Pacific summit which brought Ministers together from across Europe and our wider home region. London was an opportunity for me to meet my counterpart and advance New Zealand interests with one of our closest, longest-standing bilateral partners. Geneva allowed me to interact with key elements of the multilateral system, and to deliver Aotearoa New Zealand's statement to the annual High Level Segment of the Human Rights Council.

Detailed reporting from each destination has been produced by the relevant diplomatic post, and circulated through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's formal message system. This report provides a higher level report against the visit's objectives, highlights key outcomes and areas for follow-up, and also provides some insights into the realities of being in Europe during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and of travelling during a global pandemic.

*Aotearoa New Zealand – Independent, Principled and Engaged*

As with my trip in November, a 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 format of the meetings in Paris and Geneva, in particular, provided an opportunity for me to meet with a wide range of foreign minister counterparts from all corners of the globe, including dedicated meetings with counterparts from India, Thailand, Spain, Sweden, and Argentina. During the visit I was also able to connect with senior officials from the European Commission; the heads of key UN agencies; the Commonwealth Secretary-General; and to attend a Ministerial meeting of the Bali Process.

In all of these settings, I was able to build New Zealand's profile; to assert and advance Aotearoa New Zealand interests; to articulate our posture/approach on a range of key issues<sup>s6(a)</sup>

and to underscore New Zealand's highly principled approach to international engagements, rooted in our values.

### *The importance of in-person engagement*

My visit programme reaffirmed the importance of our Cabinet progressively stepping up international travel over the coming months to carry New Zealand's voice into the world. This is important to ensure New Zealand's interests and our unique perspectives are understood and accommodated; to understand others' views and perspectives; and importantly, to ensure we add our voice to those who share our commitment to an international order based on:

- The rule of law including respect for countries sovereignty and territorial integrity;
- Open markets with enforceable rules to promote economic prosperity; and
- Democratic systems of government which are inclusive, embrace diversity, and uphold fundamental human rights for individuals and groups.

The situation in Ukraine underlines the importance of New Zealand working in concert with like-minded partners to defend the existing international order, which we cannot take for granted, particularly in the face of President Putin's assault on the order's fundamental pillars.

### *Ukraine*

My visit to Europe coincided with what is undoubtedly the most serious threat to the global security order which we have seen since the end of World War II.<sup>s9(2)(g)(i)</sup>

When I arrived in Europe on 19 February, our partners in the US, the UK and Europe, in particular, remained heavily engaged in efforts to encourage Russia to address its concerns through diplomacy and dialogue, rather than through the threat or use of force.



Diplomatic overtures continued to be made, while at the same time governments signalled their preparations to impose some of the most far-reaching economic sanctions available in the event that President Putin did proceed with the invasion.

Efforts to dissuade Putin from invasion and the deep concern for the European security order were at the centre of all of my interactions in Paris and London. I was in London when my team woke me at 0330 hrs on 24 February to confirm that Russian troops had crossed Ukraine's border.

The invasion was also a central focus during my meetings in Geneva, particularly with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the head of the International Committee for the Red Cross. The issue also dominated the High Level Segment of the Human Rights Council, with a motion for an urgent debate on the Ukraine crisis.<sup>s6(a)</sup>

putting  
on record New Zealand's unambiguous condemnation of Russia's outrageous and illegal invasion of Ukraine – and its assault on the international security order.

It's hard to overstate the impact of Putin's invasion of the Ukraine for the European security order – but also the resulting ramifications for the security order in the Indo-Pacific, and the international rules-based order. The political/diplomatic, humanitarian and economic consequences of the invasion will be profound. The Russian economy will face severe impacts as the value of the rouble crashes, and governments and companies take steps to divest/withdraw their trade and economic links with Russia. The humanitarian cost will be high – casualty rates for combatants are high; civilian casualties are growing; and already a million people have fled the country for safety in neighbouring countries.

Ultimately, the international response to Russia's invasion matters a great deal. The international response will demonstrate what happens when one country invades another and, because it holds a veto on the UN Security Council, it can block any/all effective responses through the very body that is charged with upholding international peace and security. This matters in Europe, where Putin's revisionist views of history drive his attempt to rewrite the post-Cold War settlement.<sup>s6(a)</sup>

So far, the international response to the Russian invasion has been effective because it has been coordinated, meaningful, and decisive. The extent of the economic sanctions applied to Russia, the provision of financial aid and lethal weapons to Ukraine, and the singled-minded repudiation of the invasion manifest in the 141 countries that voted to reprimand Russia in the UN General Assembly bodes well at this early stage. I take

some heart in the pockets of progressive protest within Russia, those dismayed by Putin's behaviour and willing to speak out against it, who will remain an important cohort that we cannot afford to marginalise. However, it will be important for the international community to continue to raise the political and economic costs of the invasion for Russia as a means of encouraging Russia to step back and look for a diplomatic/negotiated solution to its security concerns. However, Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in the face of severe sanctions<sup>s6(a)</sup>

#### *Covid-19: Restrictions off in Europe*

The situation with COVID abroad has moved on significantly from my travel in November. At that time, we were subject to 16 PCR tests over the course of our travel. Just three months later, and notwithstanding significant numbers of infections across Europe, we were only required to do three tests (although we voluntarily self-administered RAT tests at various times throughout the trip). Restrictions were also being lifted – Switzerland's only COVID measure now is to require masks on public transport (i.e. no border measures, no vaccine certificate requirements, and no masks or social distancing); and the UK also lifted all measures during my visit. Europe is fast moving to living with the virus – our own liberalisation of border settings is consistent with this approach, as are the other steps under consideration by New Zealand officials advising us on the COVID response.

s9(2)(g)(i)

#### *Foreign Policy, Trade and Development Outcomes*

As noted previously, MFAT reports provide 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, in addition to the discussions on Ukraine covered above.

- The French-run EU-hosted forum on the **Indo-Pacific** was the manifestation of growing interest in the region from the European Union itself, but also a number of member states (e.g. Germany, France, the Netherlands) who have recently published Indo-Pacific strategies. The French and the EU would have been pleased with the turn-out, with the majority of foreign ministers from EU member states joined by 14 foreign ministers from the Indo-Pacific, plus the heads of the Pacific Islands Forum (Henry Puna) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association.<sup>s6(a)</sup>



s6(a)

- There was widespread interest in New Zealand's perspective on, and our approach to, **the Pacific**. At the Indo-Pacific Forum in Paris, I was invited to co-Chair a working group on 'global issues', including climate change, biodiversity, health, and just transitions. I used my opening remarks to put a spotlight on how these issues presented real challenges for our Pacific neighbours, which was reinforced by Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General Sir Henry Puna's intervention offering another important Pacific perspective. Together we emphasised the need for more urgency, more resources, and greater coordination from donors as we helped the Pacific build resilience, and to claw back some of the development gains lost through the global pandemic.<sup>s6(b)(i)</sup>
- While trade is not my portfolio, I was able to **push our trade interests along** with my foreign minister colleagues. In the UK I registered our thanks with Liz Truss for her role in delivering a high quality, comprehensive bilateral FTA.<sup>s9(2)(j)</sup>
- Geneva is the home to many **UN's specialist agencies** which engage significant New Zealand interests. My meeting with the head of the World Health Organisation, Tedros Ghebreyesus, was a rich discussion about the WHO's response to the global pandemic. Ghebreyesus was also full of admiration for New Zealand's response to the COVID pandemic, and the leadership role played by the Prime Minister. Meetings with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the Head of the International Committee of the Red Cross also provided a range of insights into the humanitarian and other consequences from the Ukraine crisis; as well as discussions about our partnership with these agencies across a broad spectrum of issues. I also had a valuable exchange with a group of civil society representatives who all specialise in the promotion of human rights and the protection of human rights defenders, which provided a useful outside-in perspective as I prepared to deliver remarks at the Human Rights Council.

- Geneva also provided a platform for us to given increased prominence to our government's emphasis on human rights as an important plank of our foreign policy. I was the first New Zealand foreign minister to attend and to speak at the **Human Rights Council** since its establishment in 2006. It was useful for me to get a sense of the Council's operations in practice – s9(2)(ba)(ii)

- 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 deep connections which I was able to make with counterparts – particularly in Geneva – through the presentation of taonga which established an emotional bond to Aotearoa New Zealand.

As I had found on my previous visit, we are extremely well served by the professionalism and commitment of our officials abroad, both from MFAT, but also other NZ Inc agencies. Many of our officials and their families have had harrowing experiences with the COVID pandemic, including up to 24 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. 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.

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 respect is deep, and built on decades of New Zealand's consistent, predictable, and largely bipartisan foreign policy. In Geneva, in particular, I was conscious of how many doors are open to us because of who we are, what we stand for, and how we conduct ourselves. It's a real asset to our country – and one which I intend to carefully steward and amplify during my tenure as foreign minister.



**Proactive release**

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