

Proactive Release

Date: 13 June 2019

The following Cabinet paper/s and related Cabinet minute/s have been proactively released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade:

Report on Overseas Travel of Under-Secretary Fletcher Tabuteau: Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE: (CAB-19-SUB-0158)

Report on Overseas Travel: Fletcher Tabuteau MP (CAB-19-MIN-0158 refers)

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Key to redaction codes:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the international relations of the New Zealand Government;

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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Fletcher Tabuteau MP

Portfolio **Foreign Affairs**

On 15 April 2019, Cabinet **noted** the report from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (Fletcher Tabuteau MP) under CAB-19-SUB-0158 on his travel, from 3 to 9 March 2019, to Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates to undertake bilateral discussions.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Hard-copy distribution:

Prime Minister
Deputy Prime Minister
Fletcher Tabuteau MP

Proactively released by the
Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs

Chair,
Cabinet

**REPORT ON OVERSEAS TRAVEL OF UNDER-SECRETARY FLETCHER
TABUTEAU: KUWAIT, QATAR, AND THE UAE**

I recommend that Cabinet note this report concerning the travel that I undertook in my capacity as Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs to Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from 3 – 9 March 2019.

2 In Kuwait (5 – 6 March), my visit heightened New Zealand’s profile and opened doors of senior decision-makers and Ministers in order to further advance opportunities for New Zealand. This was in part a response to the letter from the Kuwaiti Government in which the Foreign Minister expressed an interest in “strengthening and expanding our bilateral relations” with New Zealand. Specifically, the visit met the following objectives:

- Demonstrated the importance New Zealand attaches to the bilateral relationship by visiting Kuwait at the political level, something the Kuwaiti system attaches importance to (particularly as New Zealand is not represented on the ground in Kuwait) and which was reaffirmed by Deputy Foreign Minister al-Jarallah in our meeting.
- Progressed opportunities for further collaboration under the Kuwait-New Zealand Joint Committee for Cooperation (JCC) with Assistant Foreign Minister Reem al-Khalid, including in the fields of education, strengthening business-to-business links, agri-tech and cybersecurity.
- Reaffirmed New Zealand’s willingness to strengthen education links with Kuwait’s Minister of Education, including by increasing the number of Kuwaiti students studying in New Zealand. We reinforced the positive opportunities for Kuwaiti students in New Zealand and explored options for Education NZ to

follow up with Kuwait, given the relatively low numbers at present and the “100 percent positive feedback” the Minister of Education had received from those Kuwaiti students who had studied in New Zealand.

- Reinforced with the Minister of Commerce and Industry New Zealand’s strong “ease of doing business” ranking and responded positively to interest to collaborate in this area through New Zealand’s Regional Business Development Manager for Government-to-Government (G2G) cooperation based in the Middle East.
- Explored opportunities for further investment in New Zealand with the Managing Director of the Kuwait Investment Authority (KIA) Farouk Bastaki. We reinforced messages about New Zealand’s reputation for ease of doing business and our openness to productive investment.

3 In Qatar (6 – 7 March), the high-level engagement enabled New Zealand to reaffirm the importance of the bilateral relationship, including the direct Doha – Auckland flight and increasing tourism, as well as exploring opportunities for further engagement in the Pacific. The visit was also an opportunity to hear the Qatari view s6(a)

. Specifically, our interests were advanced by:

- Underlining the value New Zealand places on the relationship by visiting Doha at the senior political level and meeting with Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Soltan bin Saad Al-Muraikhi. We reaffirmed the tangible value the direct air service has in terms of the movement of people and goods between our two countries.
- Encouraging Minister Al-Muraikhi’s proposed visit to New Zealand^{s6(a)} and specifically his interest in engaging with New Zealand as a partner on Pacific development issues.
- Encouraging Qatari investment opportunities in New Zealand, particularly in the tourism and hospitality sector.
- Meeting with the Minister of Commerce and Industry Ali bin Ahmed Al-Kuwari to register New Zealand’s interest in Qatar’s increasing focus on building trade and economic links beyond oil and gas and how its hosting of the 2022

FIFA World Cup fits into Qatar's broader economic development. We reinforced with Minister Al-Kuwari New Zealand's ease of doing business and responded to interest from the Minister in exploring what lessons Qatar could learn to make its regulatory environment more permissive for business.

- Reinforcing New Zealand's interest in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Agreement with New Zealand and receiving updates, including from Qatar's lead FTA negotiator, about the current blockage and the opportunities that could still be advanced while the agreement remained stalled.
- Engaging with the CEO of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) to put New Zealand on the radar of the 10th largest sovereign wealth fund in the world and specifically have the QIA explore potential hospitality offerings in New Zealand.
- Engaging with the New Zealand business and expat community in Doha by speaking as the guest of honour at the Qatar, Australia and New Zealand Business Association.

4 During a brief visit to the UAE (4 March), I complemented other high-level New Zealand Government visits to the country by:

- Visiting the Sharjah Investment and Development Authority, during a visit to Sharjah – the third largest of the UAE's seven Emirates. We also met with Sharjah's government relations team to better understand the opportunities for New Zealand, specifically with a focus on education links with education being a focus of Sharjah's economic development.
- Reaffirming the importance to New Zealand of the strong links with Emirates Airline by meeting with Emirates' government relations leaders and visiting their Flight Training Centre in Dubai.

5 Overall, the visit to Kuwait, Qatar and the UAE was successful in opening the door to senior decision-makers, including relevant and receptive Ministers, and in reinforcing that New Zealand remains committed to the bilateral relationships. It was helpful to reaffirm New Zealand's interest in the GCC FTA and thank Kuwait and Qatar for their support, while exploring options for deepening the trade and

investment relationship, including strengthening education and tourism links. The visit to Sharjah, UAE, likewise opened the door for New Zealand's Embassy in Abu Dhabi to take advantage of opportunities across a range of sectors in Sharjah, particularly education.

6 The visit to the region took place shortly before the terrorist attack in Christchurch on 15 March 2019. It was humbling to see the response of support and solidarity with New Zealand in the aftermath of the attack from the countries that we visited. It served to underscore the importance of maintaining high-level political contact to help foster friendly and mutually-beneficial bilateral relations with countries across the Middle East region.

Proactive Release

7 I plan to release this paper in part within 30 business days. All redactions will be made in line with the Official Information Act 1982.

Recommendation

8 I recommend that Cabinet **note** this report.

Fletcher Tabuteau MP
Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs