

22 July 2024

195 Lambton Quay
Private Bag 18–901
Wellington 6160
New Zealand

Personal details removed for
proactive release

T +64 4 439 8000
F +64 4 472 9596

OIA 29413

Personal details removed for proactive release

We refer to your Official Information Act 1982 (OIA) transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (the Ministry) for the Ministry of Defence on 31 May 2024 for:

Please provide al written advice, notes, aides-memoire, briefings, and reports produced regarding civil unrest in New Caledonia from 13 May 2024 to 26 May 2024.

On 12 June 2024, we contacted you to explain that this OIA requests much of the same information as the request you made directly to the Ministry which has been refined to be for: *Situation Reports (SitReps) relating to New Caledonia unrest provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs dated 13 May 2024 to 10 June 2024 (inclusive)*, our reference OIA 29388. We sought a refinement of this OIA to be for information relating to unrest in New Caledonia that is not captured by your request OIA 29388. Meaning your request, transferred to the Ministry from the Ministry of Defence (our reference OIA 29413) would be for:

Formal Briefings provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the evacuation of New Zealanders from Noumea in the period 13 May 2024 to 26 May 2024.

On 16 June 2024, you responded asking for a clarification of why we were seeking to refine your request in this way.

On 18 June 2024, we called you and left a voice message explaining that the purpose of the refinement was to provide you with the information relating to unrest in New Caledonia that is outside the scope of your other OIA request for information relating to unrest in New Caledonia, our reference OIA 29388.

On 19 June 2024, we followed up with an email outlining the reason for our request to refine.

On 21 June 2024 you responded, agreeing to refine your request to be for:

Formal Briefings provided to the Minister of Foreign Affairs about the evacuation of New Zealanders from Noumea in the period 13 May 2024 to 26 May 2024.

There are three formal briefings are in scope of your request.

1. Meeting Brief: Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji
2. Meeting Brief: Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku of the Kingdom of Tonga
3. New Zealand Defence Force Deployment: Evacuating New Zealanders from Noumea

These briefings are attached. We have withheld some information under the following sections of the OIA:

- 6(a): to avoid prejudicing the security or defence of New Zealand or the international relations of the New Zealand Government; and
- 6(b)(i): to protect the passing of information from another government on a confidential basis;
- 9(2)(a): to protect individuals' privacy; and
- 9(2)(g)(i): to protect the free and frank expression of opinions by departments.

Where the information has been withheld under section 9 of the OIA, no public interest in releasing the information has been identified that would override the reasons for withholding it.

Please note that it is our policy to proactively release our responses to official information requests where possible. Therefore, our response to your request (with your personal information removed) may be published on the Ministry website: www.mfat.govt.nz/en/about-us/contact-us/official-information-act-responses/

If you have any questions about this decision, you can contact us by email at: DM-ESD@mfat.govt.nz. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision by contacting www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SC', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Corbett
for Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Meeting Brief: Honourable Sitiveni Rabuka, Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji

Time and date (NZT): **TBC**



Sitiveni Rabuka became Fiji's Prime Minister for the second time in December 2022. He made a Guest-of-Government visit to New Zealand in June 2023. You last met during your visit to Fiji in December 2023.

Rabuka's three-way coalition, between his People's Alliance Party and two smaller parties, holds a slim Parliamentary majority. He also holds the ministerial portfolios of Foreign Affairs, Climate Change, Environment, Civil Service, Information, Public Enterprises and Veterans Affairs.

s6(a)

Key objectives

- Seek Prime Minister Rabuka's views on the New Caledonia unrest and s6(a)
- Discuss next steps, including support from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF). Ask about the potential for a statement from the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG).

Discussion points

- Emphasise New Zealand's concern about the situation in New Caledonia. Inform Prime Minister Rabuka that you are speaking with regional leaders and calling for calm.
- Underline that New Zealand shares the concern felt by other PIF members about the recent violence. s6(a)
- Note that Fiji, as a member of the current PIF Troika, will be an important moderating voice should the situation deteriorate. s6(a)
- Note that the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) leadership has made statements calling for calm. Ask whether the MSG has discussed the situation and whether there any plans for an MSG statement.
- *[if raised]* Note that New Zealand stands ready to bring New Zealanders in New Caledonia home, on NZDF flights or through chartered options, as soon as French authorities give the necessary permissions. New Zealand will do what it can to assist Fiji and other Pacific partners who have nationals stranded in New Caledonia.
- s6(b)(i)

Background

1. Prime Minister Rabuka has yet to make a statement on the unrest in New Caledonia.
2. s6(a)

s6(a)

3. MFAT is currently aware of approximately 290 New Zealanders in New Caledonia as of 20 May.
4. s6(b)(i)

Pacific Melanesia and Micronesia Division
21 May 2024

Released under the Official Information Act

Meeting Brief: Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku of the Kingdom of Tonga

Time and date (NZT): Wednesday 22 May, 2024 at 5pm



Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku [Prime Minister *who-ah-kava-may-e-lee-coo*] was first appointed to the Legislative Assembly of Tonga in 2014 and appointed Prime Minister in December 2021. PM Hu'akavameiliku also holds the Education and Training; and Police, Fire Services and Emergency Services portfolios. At the King's direction he recently stood down from the Defence portfolio, and took on Foreign Affairs in an acting capacity. PM Hu'akavameiliku undertook secondary and tertiary education in New Zealand (on scholarships) and postgraduate studies at the University of Oxford and University of the South Pacific. The

Prime Minister is positively disposed to, and has significant personal connections in, New Zealand.

Key objectives

- Seek Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku's insights on the New Caledonia unrest and his views on a possible resolution.
- Discuss next steps, including support from New Zealand and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF).

Discussion points

- Convey New Zealand's serious concern about the unrest in New Caledonia. Our immediate priority is for all sides to take steps to de-escalate the situation, so that there can be dialogue and calm.
- Note our focus also on the well-being of people on the ground, including New Zealanders. Confirm that New Zealand is exploring all options to support its citizens on the ground, including assisted departures using NZDF aircraft or a chartered aircraft. Note your awareness that Tongan nationals are also present in New Caledonia; is assistance required to support them to leave?
- We recognise and share the concern felt by other PIF members at the recent violence. This will be an important discussion to navigate, including at upcoming PIF meetings which Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku may chair. Encouraging dialogue and unity is the best approach.
- s6(a)

any further requests for support.

We would be glad to consider

Background

1. Though Prime Minister Hu'akavameiliku has yet to assume the PIF Chair from Cook Islands' Prime Minister Mark Brown, he is following events across the region. s6(a)
2. s6(b)(i)
3. s6(b)(i)
4. Tonga's Chief Secretary, Paula Pouvalu Ma'u, has advised there are a small number of Tongan nationals in New Caledonia s6(b)(i)

While New Zealand's plans for assisted departure flights are still being worked through, we are considering requests to support foreign nationals, including from the Pacific.

5. Prime Minister Hu'akaveimeiliku is in Samoa. He will continue to Antigua and Barbuda for the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS4), which is taking place on 27-30 May.

Pacific Islands Forum Chair Support

6. s6(a)

We have conveyed to Tonga, on a number of occasions, our willingness to consider additional requests for support.

*Pacific Polynesia and French Pacific Division
21 May 2024*



17 May 2024

Minister of Defence

Minister of Foreign Affairs

NEW ZEALAND DEFENCE FORCE DEPLOYMENT: EVACUATING NEW ZEALANDERS FROM NOUMEA

Purpose

1. To seek approval to operate assisted departure flights, deploying New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) aircraft and personnel, to support the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade consular operation to evacuate New Zealanders and other approved individuals from New Caledonia.

Background

2. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) has activated its Emergency Crisis Centre to manage the consular response to the civil unrest and rioting in Noumea.

3. The capital continues to experience significant unrest and violence despite the state of emergency declaration, imposition of curfews, and arrival of security service reinforcements from France. A further 1,000 reinforcements are expected over the next 24 hours. While the New Zealand Consulate reports that the situation has somewhat stabilised overnight, the situation remains serious and volatile. The deployment of additional security services may lead to an escalation in violence before order can be restored. La Tontouta Airport will remain closed until at least 9am Tuesday 21 May, meaning New Zealanders booked on Air New Zealand and Qantas services scheduled for the coming days will now add to the growing backlog of stranded travellers.

4. The situation remains highly uncertain and any on-the-ground improvements, including a re-opening of La Tontouta, rely on the immediate restoration of order and clearance of significant security threats lining key artillery roads across Noumea.

5. Over 200 New Zealanders are registered with MFAT as visiting or living in New Caledonia. None have reported an imminent personal security threat, but there is significant concern that due to challenges with distribution, access to food, water and medicine supplies may reach critical levels in the coming days. Consular officials are also managing one, potentially significant, medical case. Anxiety levels are heightened for 85 New Zealanders staying in four-star hotels that have implemented some form of food rationing or have signalled stocks may run out if French forces are unable to

RESTRICTED

quickly distribute supplies. There is significant demand amongst stranded New Zealanders for help, and an expectation that the Government will shortly commence with evacuation services given the extended closure of La Tontouta Airport.

6. New Zealand also has formal consular arrangements with Switzerland, Netherlands and Samoa to provide assistance to their citizens in the Pacific,^{s6(a)}

Proposed deployment

7. Given this situation, MFAT is requesting support from the NZDF to provide strategic airlift support to a proposed consular evacuation operation. The NZDF is able to provide support to other government agencies, and in support of mandated government activities such as consular efforts, subject to the approval of relevant Ministers where the context is high profile or particularly complex [CAB-21-MIN-0439].

8. The proposed operation would take place in the coming days, potentially commencing as early as Saturday 18 May, and would indicatively involve:

- The deployment of a suitable Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) aircraft, operated under MFAT's Assisted Departures consular policy, to Noumea's domestic Magenta Airport (NMA) or any other appropriate air facility in New Caledonia.
- Same-day evacuation of approximately 80 New Zealanders per flight prioritised on a vulnerability basis if demand exceeds capacity, and returning to Auckland. The specific numbers per flight and route may change depending on the timing of the operation and the NZDF aircraft available.
- With costs being met by the New Zealand Government (funded from within NZDF baselines).

9. NMA has been secured by security services and has been requisitioned as a base for military operations. It is a smaller airport and inaccessible for international commercial aircraft, but is capable of supporting a C-130 service. NMA is not as severely impacted by the blockades which are forcing La Tontouta's closure, and is located close to two major hotels where 85 New Zealanders are currently residing.

10. The proposed operation would only take place if the following conditions were met:

- Operation and landing approvals granted by French authorities.
- NMA remains secure and the wider security environment is deemed safe and acceptable by the NZDF.

RESTRICTED

- A safe ground transportation operation arranged by New Caledonian authorities or the New Zealand Consulate (supported by any necessary escorts), was possible.
- La Tontouta International remains closed to commercial operators and there is sufficient demand for evacuation services.

11. The NZDF crew for this operation would be made up of aircrew and support staff, with support from MFAT consular officials from Wellington and New Zealand's Consulate in Noumea.

New Zealand's Assisted Departures policy

12. Four principles guide MFAT's policy on when assisted departure or evacuation flights should be considered:

1. Commercial departure services are unavailable.
2. There is a risk to the safety or security of New Zealanders if they do not depart.
3. The operation is consistent with MFAT's travel advice – government support will generally only be considered for territories which have travel advisories set at their highest levels – 'avoid non-essential travel' or 'do not travel'.
4. NZDF assets are available.

13. While the security situation in Noumea could improve in the coming days, the current on-the-ground situation meets all four criteria (MFAT travel advisory for New Caledonia is set at the second highest level – avoid non-essential travel).

Operation cost

14. As noted above, this operation will be funded from NZDF baselines.

15. s9(2)(g)(i)

16. s9(2)(g)(i)

RESTRICTED

s9(2)(g)(i)

Additional benefits from an evacuation operation

17. There are significant ancillary benefits from this operation:

- It will enable MFAT to deploy surge resources into the New Zealand Consulate in Noumea to support the crisis response effort and to relieve a small, fatigued team. ^{s9(2)(a)}
- Subject to any spare capacity, it offers an opportunity for New Zealand to support the nationals of a number of close consular partners
- Capacity to carry any goods into Noumea that are in critical need, such as medical supplies (blood stocks) or aid requested by partners (New Caledonia government or partner NGOs).

Legal Considerations

18. ^{s6(a)}

The deployment will at all times only enter the airspace and territory of other countries with the appropriate diplomatic clearances and consent of those countries, and will at all times be conducted in a manner consistent with international law.

Risks

Risk	Mitigation
French and/or New Caledonian authorities deny requests for RNZAF aircraft to operate in Noumea	Senior diplomatic representations made in Paris and Noumea.
New Zealanders unhappy that some travellers are prioritised for evacuation over others.	Clear communication to New Zealanders that seats on evacuation flights will be allocated on <i>both</i> a need (children, elderly, travellers with medical/other needs, etc given priority) and first-come first-served basis.
New Zealanders unhappy that foreign nationals are given access to flights.	Vast majority of seats on initial flights allocated to New Zealanders.
Significant numbers of foreign nationals stranded in Auckland.	Flights cease once need to evacuate New Zealand citizens ends. Undertakings agreed with resident embassies that they are responsible for

RESTRICTED

	ensuring onward travel plans and supporting foreign nationals once they arrive in Auckland.
Demand for foreign national evacuations exceeds our ability to accommodate.	Risk limited due to expected commercial airline operations resuming mid next week. Close coordination with Australia on their likely assisted departure operations and additional capacity before then. Spaces for foreign nationals allocated on the basis of need/vulnerability.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that you:

a) Note that Noumea continues to experience significant unrest and violence despite the state of emergency declaration and that the security outlook remains highly uncertain and volatile.

Noted

b) Note that the closure of Noumea's international airport has been extended to at least Tuesday 21 May 2024 and this is affecting a significant number of the over 200 New Zealanders registered as visiting or residing in New Caledonia.

Noted

c) Note that there is significant and growing concern that access to food, water and medicine supplies may reach critical levels in the coming days.

Noted

d) Note that the situation in Noumea meets the conditions to operate assisted departure/evacuation operations under MFAT's consular policy.

Noted

e) Approve the deployment of suitable RNZAF aircraft and crew, operated under MFAT's Assisted Departures consular policy, to Noumea's domestic Magenta Airport (NMA) or any other appropriate air facility in New Caledonia to evacuate stranded New Zealanders.

Yes / No

f) Agree that the operation would be subject to the following conditions:

- Necessary approvals and support from French and New Caledonian authorities.


RESTRICTED

- The operation of suitable ground transportation options that enable stranded New Zealanders to safely travel to an evacuation point.
- La Tontouta International remains closed to commercial operators and there is sufficient demand for evacuation services

Yes / No

- g) Approve utilising spare capacity to assist the evacuation of foreign nationals where a request is made by a close partner government, and provided travellers have the right to enter New Zealand.

Yes / No


KR SHORT
Air Marshal
Chief of Defence Force
Date:


ANDREW BRIDGMAN
Secretary of Defence
Date: 17/11/24


PHILLIP TAULA
For Acting Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Date:

HON JUDITH COLLINS KC
Minister of Defence
Date:

HON WINSTON PETERS
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Date: