

Proactive Release

Date: 6 April 2020

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

Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters and Hon Aupito William Sio

(CAB-20-MIN-0042 refers)

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Cabinet

Minute of Decision

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Report on Overseas Travel: Rt Hon Winston Peters and Hon Aupito William Sio

Portfolios **Foreign Affairs / Pacific Peoples**

On 24 February 2020, Cabinet **noted** the report from the Rt Hon Winston Peters and Hon Aupito William Sio under CAB-20-SUB-0042 on their travel, from 13 to 14 December 2019, to Samoa, to undertake bilateral meetings and assess the impact of New Zealand's assistance following the measles outbreak.

Michael Webster
Secretary of the Cabinet

Hard-copy distribution:
Prime Minister
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Minister for Pacific Peoples

Chair

Cabinet

REPORT ON OVERSEAS TRAVEL: RT HON WINSTON PETERS AND HON AUPITO WILLIAM SIO, SAMOA: 13-14 DECEMBER

I recommend that Cabinet note this report on my travel to Samoa from 13-14 December 2019.

Report

I made a brief visit to Samoa (i.e. 36 hours), accompanied by the Minister of Pacific Peoples, Hon Aupito William Sio. The purpose of the visit was to demonstrate New Zealand's support to Samoa following a devastating measles outbreak there. This included our willingness to support Samoa in the response and recovery phase of the outbreak and to assist with longer term health sector reform.

2 Our visit included bilateral meetings with Samoa's Prime Minister, Hon Tuilaepa Lufesolai Aiono Sailele Malielegaoi; Deputy Prime Minister, Hon Fiaame Naomi Mataafa; and Minister of Health, Hon Faimalotoa Kika Stowers Ah Kau. We also visited local medical facilities to assess the impact of New Zealand's contribution to the response (including New Zealand's funding for the provision of medical personnel and supplies), and gauge future areas of need. To that end, we met with the New Zealand Medical Assistance team, New Zealand Red Cross, and the Pasifika Medical Assistance team. We also met with the response teams from the UNICEF and the World Health Organisation and visited a local hospital laboratory for which New Zealand provided new equipment to support the response.

Bilateral Meetings

3 The bilateral meetings provided an opportunity to convey, in person, New Zealand's condolences to Samoa for the loss of life and broader impact suffered by the measles outbreak. We registered that in the spirit of the New Zealand-Samoa 'Treaty of Friendship', New Zealand stood ready to assist Samoa. This included assistance to Samoa as it moved into the recovery phase of the outbreak and for its longer term focus on addressing systemic issues in the health sector. This message was also reinforced publicly by Minister Sio, during a separate media interview, conducted in Samoan, with the Savali local newspaper. During the interview he reinforced New Zealand's commitment to support Samoa in the response and recovery phase of the outbreak.

4 In bilateral meetings and a subsequent press conference, Prime Minister Tuilaepa and Deputy Prime Minister Fiame expressed gratitude for New Zealand's response. Both noted New Zealand's contributions to the mass vaccination campaign through the timely provision of vaccines and nurse vaccinators. Minister of Health Faimalotoa detailed the full range of New Zealand's support and emphasised that New Zealand was among the first countries to offer assistance to Samoa. Prime Minister Tuilaepa also expressed appreciation for our ongoing offers of support, describing New Zealand as a "true friend."

5 Although Samoa was interested in accepting New Zealand's assistance for the recovery phase of the outbreak, it was less clear whether it would take up New Zealand's offer to assist with longer term health sector reform. Minister of Health Faimalotoa signalled an interest in the proposal for New Zealand experts to assist with documenting lessons learned from the outbreak and future planning for Samoa's health sector. The Ministry of Health was also planning to establish a Primary Health Care Centre to provide early interventions and preventative care (including immunizations) for Samoa's growing urban population. It was clear that Samoa was interested in holding further discussions with New Zealand to explore whether we could assist with this initiative.

6 Separate to the measles outbreak, Prime Minister Tuilaepa welcomed the news that New Zealand was funding the deployment of a network of DART (Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunami) buoys that would provide tsunami monitoring and detection information for Pacific countries including Tokelau, Niue, the Cook Islands, Tonga and Samoa. Prime Minister Tuilaepa commented that it would assist in attenuating vulnerability to tsunamis generated by tectonic activity at the Tongan trench to the South of Samoa.

7 We warmly received Deputy Prime Minister Fiame's and Minister of Health Faimalotoa's offer of condolences in relation to the Whakaari/White Island tragedy.

Joint Press Conference with Prime Minister Tuilaepa

8 During the joint press conference, questions from local media focused on the provenance of disease. In response, we emphasized that any claims suggesting the disease was introduced by a New Zealand traveller would need to be backed by evidence. It was important that in the wake of the outbreak focus remained on "remediation, repair, cure, and solutions." We also noted that it was important that Samoa and the Pacific (including New Zealand) took the opportunity to identify lessons learned from the outbreak.

9 Prime Minister Tuilaepa focused his answers on border security protocols. He noted that many Pacific countries had a similar approach in terms of requiring self-declaration of illness and emphasised the importance of vaccination and medical interventions, as opposed to delayed treatment and reliance on traditional healers. Prime Minister Tuilaepa reflected in a Samoan language speech the following day that the epidemic could not be blamed on anyone and expressed his appreciation for our visit – noting that New Zealand was the first of Samoa's partners to do so.

Site Visits

10 Site visits to local hospitals enabled us to see first-hand the impact of New Zealand's contributions to the response. It was clear that New Zealand emergency responders were making a real difference and working in close

collaboration with the Samoan workforce. It was pleasing to see that New Zealand's support for Leulumoega Rural District Hospital had transformed the hospital away from being an under-resourced and over-whelmed facility. It was also clear that the provision of equipment to the Tupua Tamasese Meaole laboratory had made a tangible difference to the quality of care and patient outcomes.

11 Samoan medical professionals were grateful for New Zealand's support but noted that more would be welcomed. Starting from a "low base", we were told that local medical facilities contended with the ongoing challenges of limited resources and staff. A local psychiatrist noted that without the support of countries like New Zealand, he alone would have had to provide psychosocial support for the entire nation which was reeling from the impact of the outbreak.

Proactive Release

12 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

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

Approved for lodgement

Rt Hon Winston Peters
Minister of Foreign Affairs