

New Zealand's 2nd Universal Periodic Review

Minister's Closing Remarks

27 January 2014

[10 minutes]

[845 words]

OPTIONAL

[Mr President, before turning to my concluding remarks, I would like to respond to the last set of questions, comments and recommendations from States, I can make the following remarks [address any of the questions, comments and/or recommendations at your discretion (3 minutes)].

The Canterbury earthquakes have presented the Government with one of the most significant challenges that any New Zealand government has ever had to face. The Canterbury earthquakes started in September 2010 and since then there have been more than 11,000 earthquakes in the Canterbury region, which includes New Zealand's second largest city – Christchurch. A national emergency was declared after the 22 February 2011 earthquake when 185 lives were lost, 11,432 people were injured, and 171,000 residential properties damaged. A further 8,000 properties are on damaged land or land that has an unacceptable level of life risk. More than half of the buildings in Christchurch's central business district were severely damaged. The current estimate of earthquake damage is \$40 billion, which is 20% of New Zealand's GDP. For a small country this has been devastating.

New Zealand is very grateful for the substantial international assistance we received from a number of countries and for the rescue teams and personnel who worked so hard under difficult conditions. It serves as a lesson that no country is immune to disasters and that any one of us may call on the help of the international community in our time of need.

As Minister of Police at the time, I was very proud that despite the most trying and difficult of conditions there was no civil disorder or violence. Government agencies were deployed straight away to help maintain order. A business social assistance programme was put into effect in order to continue to pay people wages and give them financial assurance. Lessons learnt on collaboration between agencies are now being replicated across the country. The people of Canterbury have displayed extraordinary resilience. They have endured emotional and financial loss, and yet have continued to remain positive about outcomes for the region. Following a natural exodus after the quakes, the population is now growing again. I recently turned the first sod on the new Justice and Emergency Services Precinct for Christchurch, which is the first Government anchor project for the rebuild.

The more than 11,000 earthquakes presented challenges in restoring people's dignity and fundamental rights as recognised under

New Zealand's human rights legislation and international obligations. The Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority was established in response to the earthquakes. The Government's Recovery Strategy has provisions for economic, social, and cultural recovery as well as for the built and natural environment.

In regard to the advance question provided by Spain the New Zealand Government recognises the trauma experienced by those in Canterbury. Additional services were established to deliver short term counselling and support. Community mental health services and alcohol and drug services have been increased. New mental health services were established within six months of the February earthquake for people suffering severe anxiety related to the earthquakes. An extensive health promotion social marketing campaign was initiated to respond to the mental health and wellbeing needs of the majority of the population in order to attempt to stem the tide of more serious mental illness developing. Training has been provided to health, social service and education workforces on resilience, self management and stress management. This is ongoing. Mental health services are also being provided in schools in an attempt to better support children and young person's needs and school staff.

Mr President, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the human rights situation in New Zealand. I would also like to acknowledge the New Zealand delegation that has supported me today. I would like to thank the Working Group for their insightful comments, questions and recommendations. I would also like to thank the Secretariat and the Troika for their efforts in supporting our review. You have validated my opening remarks that we have a lot to be proud of in New Zealand, but we are always seeking to improve.

While today's dialogue is crucial, it means little without action behind it. Government Ministers will consider all recommendations that have been put forward today.

New Zealand's 2nd Action Plan on Human Rights is currently being prepared by the New Zealand Human Rights Commission. As a key human rights policy measure, it will identify issues to consider over the next five years so that the rights of New Zealanders are better recognised, protected and respected. The timing of this plan has been calibrated so that the reflections from this meeting today can inform the process.

In closing, I would again emphasize the proud record of human rights in our country. Although there is no society that is free from human rights challenges, the New Zealand Government is working continually to ensure that rights are realised for every member of

our society. I have mentioned the challenges we face to this day, and the action we are taking to meet these challenges. Processes such as this review help us constantly improve the promotion and protection of human rights in New Zealand.

Thank you Mr President.