



Office of the Prime Minister
Press Release

Hon Henry Puna – Address to the Nation

17 May 2020

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Kia Orana to you all, and special greetings to those of you who arrived back home last Friday afternoon, and now undergoing your supervised quarantine and medical clearance at the Edgewater Resort Hotel. On behalf of us all, I extend a heartfelt Kia Orana and a warm welcome home, and trust you are all good in spirits this weekend.

It is so comforting to claim the Lord's promise in Psalms 91:14,15... Because he loves me, says the Lord, I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

Our first arrivals are no doubt looking forward to these final days, of being separated from their loved ones, as we, too, are anticipating a successful completion of this important step of your journey.

And on Friday, a fresh timeframe of quarantine began, for our second planeload of returning residents. My wife and I were pleased to welcome everyone home at the airport, and to be part of the emotional joy that was on display by those waiting patiently, with signs of love and support.

The entire arrival process was well-managed and professional. Our thanks go to all the frontline personnel involved in the clearance, and transportation of the 101 returnees, right through to their settlement at the Edgewater Resort. There are now 231 persons undergoing supervised quarantine at the resort.

The hotel and its management and staff also have our deep appreciation, for all their preparations and procedures to look after our people. They are working long hours, and are providing a unique and necessary service, on our behalf.

We must remember, however, that this is a supervised quarantine facility. It must be treated as such and respected for its intended purpose. That is, the complete health and safety of all those concerned, as well as all of us in the broader community.

Security is therefore important, and I ask you all to appreciate the work being demanded of our Police Officers, to keep us all safe. We are in an unfortunate position of having to uphold a new law to combat the coronavirus, and the security arrangements around supervised quarantine, must be preserved.

Although it is early days yet, I am informed that everyone is settling in well into this new environment, with the best possible policies and practices in place. Next Friday will see the

arrival, and continuation of supervised quarantine and medical clearance, for a third cohort of returnees.

The challenges of this return home, however, are part of a much broader journey, that is not yet over. All those coming home now, become embraced by a unified effort, to keep our country safe from the harmful impacts of COVID-19. We welcome everyone home, but the journey forward is not yet done.

More than ever, our resolve against COVID-19 must continue to stand firm. And stay focused. Uncertainty prevails everywhere, and that demands our priority to stand together. And work together.

We need to be encouraged by our faith, that doing everything we can possibly do, will ultimately be guided by the trust we have placed in the Lord. By His words, the Lord is the lamp beneath our feet. And His words are the light for our path.

In the days and weeks ahead, we must take those steps together. With patience and cooperation, we can face the challenges of uncertainty. Time is what we need. Uncertainty is what we are faced with, and time is how we are constrained to manage it.

For example, our journey together, is bound by the time it takes for us, to work closely with the processes and rules set by the New Zealand Government, and its public health arrangements.

As the main gateway into our country, the progress of New Zealand's battle against COVID-19, has a significant direct bearing on our own measures. And at present, there are positive signs that New Zealand's Level 2 status is holding well.

What remains is the time we must take, to determine and evaluate its progress. It will take many days, but the current outlook is already helping us scope out the options, to continue with a new repatriation process.

Our approach is continuing to be guided, by the traditional principle of no one in the tribe, must be left behind. And while we will still need to meet, all the appropriate but necessary public health requirements, we have teams of professionals working hard, to consolidate the circumstances of our remaining stranded overseas, and to prepare the groundwork for their safe return.

The contacts will be pursued in the immediate future, as we determine the constraints and difficulties, for those prepared to travel, including our people stranded beyond New Zealand, migrating Cook Islanders, contracted workers, and students.

Your patience and cooperation will see us through, and we shall continue that path together.

Kia Manuia and may God continue to bless us all.

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