

6 November 2020

Prime Minister

Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade

Minister of Finance and Minister of Immigration. cc: Members of Parliament

Post-election Briefing for Incoming Ministers 2020

“God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.”

– Pope Francis “Fratelli Tutti” p2.

Summary of main points

- Help reduce poverty by helping people in need to receive the support they are entitled to.
- Act justly towards tangata whenua through resolution of outstanding Treaty of Waitangi claims.
- Alleviate the housing crisis by funding and facilitating the rapid construction of social housing in both the government and community housing sectors in partnership with iwi and community housing providers.
- Give hope to young people by encouraging them to enrol and participate in education, training or employment opportunities. Continue to also monitor the availability and effectiveness of mental health programmes to ensure that people who need support with mental health and addiction issues can get it.
- Ensure that education and training leads to productive and rewarding work by promoting greater co-operation and communications between local training and education providers with local employers.
- Support and fund the expansion of effective refugee resettlement schemes to help new arrivals feel welcome, supported and able to integrate well into their new homes when the global pandemic recedes.
- Prioritise family reunification in government policy and refugee settlement criteria with existing places being carried over to 2020-21 if they were unable to be taken up in 2019-20 due to Covid19.
- Continue with the “Pacific reset” initiative to help grow New Zealand’s presence with local partners in the Pacific region. Fulfil New Zealand’s international commitments by gradually increasing spending on Aid and development to 0.7% of GNI by 2025/26.
- Accelerate New Zealand’s progress on responding to climate change through ensuring that climate finance can more easily be accessed by grassroots communities that are most impacted; Making rapid progress on the new National Determined Contribution (NDC) to ensure we are going to meet or exceed our international climate commitments; ban seabed mining in our Exclusive Economic Zone; and seek a global moratorium on deep sea mining and exploration until more is known on the impacts of ecosystems and communities.

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' agency for justice, peace and development. We work on behalf of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference for a world free of poverty and injustice through community development, advocacy, education, and emergency relief.
2. Our work is shaped by Catholic Social Teaching, which reinforces the dignity of each and every person, along with their responsibilities, regardless of culture, ethnicity, gender or religion. We promote, in particular, the principles of:
 - Human dignity – Te Mana i te Tangata;
 - Solidarity – Whakawhānaungatanga;
 - Subsidiarity - Mana Whakahaere;
 - Preferential option for the poor and vulnerable - He Whakaaro Nui mō te Hunga Rawakore;
 - Participation - Nāu te Rourou, Nāku te Rourou;
 - Promotion of Peace – Te Whakatairanga i te Rangimārie;
 - Distributive Justice – Te Tika ka Tohaina;
 - Stewardship – Kaitiakitanga; and
 - The Common Good - He Painga mā te Katoa.

Priorities for Aotearoa New Zealand in a Covid world

3. As the new government takes office and new Ministerial objectives are set for the next three years we encourage Ministers to reflect on the enduring social injustices present both within Aotearoa New Zealand and globally.
4. The experience of most New Zealanders during 2020 was a strong sense of collective will to defeat Covid 19. The combination of effective health policy decisions, clear and strong leadership combined with a strong sense of public solidarity by groups across the political spectrum helped to deliver a world-leading response with a level of success that is sought by many other nations.
5. Recognising the dignity and worth of all people is core to building a world in which this and future generations can flourish. The global pandemic has exposed weaknesses in systems. Pope Francis has talked often about the need for nations throughout the world to regenerate society and not return to so-called “normality”, where the normality we once knew was “sick with injustice”. The virus has highlighted so many injustices, all of which are the result of humankind. “To come out of the pandemic, we must find the cure not only for the coronavirus, but also for the great human and socio-economic viruses”.
6. In his recent encyclical, “Fratelli Tutti” (para.18) Pope Francis said:

“Some parts of our human family, it appears, can be readily sacrificed for the sake of others considered worthy of a carefree existence. Ultimately, ‘persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, ‘not yet useful – like the unborn, or ‘no longer needed’ – like the elderly. We have grown indifferent to all kinds of wastefulness, starting with the waste of food, which is deplorable in the extreme.”

7. In his General Audience on September 23rd, Pope Francis said:

“Hope is audacious. Let's encourage ourselves to dream big, seeking the ideals of justice and social love that are born of hope, trying not to reconstruct an unjust and unhealthy past, but a future in which mutual enrichment allows the beauty and the wealth of smaller groups to flourish, and where those who have more dedicate themselves to service and give more to those who have less.”

8. We support the aim of governing in the best interests of the common good. As we continue to be vigilant against any return of the virus to New Zealand we also need to raise our horizons to other sicknesses in our midst. Sicknesses of poverty, racism and social injustice. We don't need to look very far to see the inequalities suffered by many Māori in this country.

Tangata whenua

9. Māori over-representation in incarceration rates, home ownership rates, negative health statistics, and material hardship have been well publicised and the research is very clear.

10. Now is the time to create a clear plan of action to ensure that all New Zealanders are treated with fairness and that all people have access to the necessities of life including housing, food, education and healthcare.

11. In creating effective solutions we strongly recommend that the voices of Maori communities are heard and listened to as New Zealand's post Covid recovery is planned and implemented. It will also be vital that the prevalent but distorted narrative of failure is corrected. We all need to acknowledge successful initiatives such as those of iwi organisations fostering home ownership for Māori. A secure, stable and safe place to call home is essential for the future flourishing of tangata whenua and all other New Zealanders. Caritas also acknowledges the wisdom that can be gained by listening to the perspectives of Te Ao Māori – particularly in relation to stewardship of the natural world.

12. We also note the recent call by the New Zealand Māori Council for transformational change including:

- looking into outstanding Waitangi Tribunal claims
- resolution to current issues in Oranga Tamariki and
- the need to fast-track the building of affordable housing.

Poverty

13. In the year ended June 2019, about one in seven New Zealand children (168,500) lived in households with less than 50 percent of the median equivalised disposable household income before housing costs are deducted.

14. After housing costs have been deducted, the number of children living in New Zealand in relative poverty is one in five children (235,400). This measure, accounting for both inflation and the impact of housing costs, shows about 20.8 percent of children live in households with an income below half the 2017/18 median equivalised disposable household income.

15. Poverty can be overcome. We welcome the government's initiatives so far in increasing the main benefits and the Winter Energy Payment. We also welcome the move to set targets for the reduction of child poverty through the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018. A report commissioned by the Ministry of Social

Development (Perry B. 2019) sets out the following ways of addressing or alleviating poverty in New Zealand:

- increasing household income (whether it be from higher total earnings, increased government cash assistance or reduced tax)
- having the demands on the core household budget reduced (for example, through government services and government subsidies such as those for free doctor's visits for under 14s, reduced fees for Community Services Card holders, child care subsidies, the SuperGold Card for older New Zealanders, KickStart Breakfast in schools programme; and through the work of various NGOs (including food banks))
- households having some financial savings to help deal with shocks to the budget (for example, loss or reduction in paid employment, unexpected health issues that incur costs or reduce earning capacity, unexpected large bill for the car)
- households getting better at using a given income to meet basic needs (for example, through improved budgeting, healthy family functioning (tension and chaos reduce efficiency), improving life skills, better access to government and community services, and so on)
- low income households having improved neighbourhood amenities, including public transport services.¹

16. Just as it was important to listen and heed expert advice in overcoming Coronavirus, so too it is vital that the government heed the evidence and expert advice on substantially reducing child poverty within this decade.

Housing supply

17. Monte Cecilia Housing Trust chief executive Bernie Smith laments the chronic housing shortage in Auckland. The recent \$12million upgrade (\$8million of which was via a government loan) has helped the Trust to provide more public housing. But Smith said the demand for emergency housing services such as Monte Cecilia should never have been allowed to grow so big over the years. "In 2016, we had 30 properties. Today we've got 400 properties, we've got 300 families waiting for a home and it just saddens me, particularly when children are involved," he said.
18. The public housing register has more than tripled from 5844 in September 2017 to 19,438 in July 2020. The potential consequences are overcrowding, poor health and poor educational outcomes. The need for rapid construction of a variety of public housing types has never been greater. We look forward to seeing tangible progress in the number of new houses built over the next three years compared to the last three years.²

Mental health

19. A global financial crisis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and a global pandemic combined with all the usual pressures of life in the 21st century have eroded the mental health of many in our community who are simply finding it hard to cope. When these trigger events come on top of experiences of disadvantage, racism and other forms of discrimination and isolation then it is not surprising that New

¹ <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/monitoring/household-incomes/household-incomes-1982-to-2018.html>

² <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2020/10/nz-election-2020-housing-crisis-now-chaos-emergency-provider.html>

Zealand has a real challenge around mental health³. We welcome the Budget 2019 initiatives to expand mental health services and to help overcome addiction.⁴ It will be important to track progress against these initiatives over the next three years to ensure that the programmes funded are helping to turn things around for vulnerable people in our communities.

Refugees, Migrants and human trafficking

20. Catholic social teaching has always emphasised the need to help the sojourner in a foreign land, to be hospitable to visitors and to welcome encounter with people from other cultures and backgrounds. A sense of creative openness to others helps people to be fruitful and productive. It also helps reduce xenophobia and racism. As Pope Francis has said “there is a problem when doubts and fears condition our way of thinking and acting to the point of making us intolerant.”⁵
21. New Zealand is a nation of migrants. Some have been here for a short time, others have been here longer. As a small island nation New Zealand will continue to need to welcome newcomers who wish to commit to New Zealand and make their home here. We ask that the government give serious consideration to introducing legislation requiring businesses to report publicly on transparency in supply chains, to help eliminate practices of modern slavery. New Zealand law needs updating to develop country specific, unique Modern Slavery Legislation for New Zealand businesses.
22. Caritas has collaborated with other community groups to help welcome refugees into New Zealand through the Community Organisation Refugee Sponsorship (CORS) pilot programme. We believe there is a willingness in our communities to help support refugees as they settle into their new country and make a home here. We urge the government to sustainably welcome, protect, promote and integrate new arrivals. A key part of settling here is overcoming concerns about immediate family members left behind in parts of the world still beset by war, persecution or disaster. Family reunification therefore needs greater emphasis in the government’s policy mix. We note that some of the refugee placements that were unable to be taken up this year, due to Covid, under the Refugee Family Support Category, should rolled over into 2020-21 or subsequent years after the global pandemic has receded.
23. During the global pandemic it has been necessary to temporarily restrict international travel to protect the health and wellbeing of people. Fortunately technology still enables us to engage with people from other countries and for trade relationships to continue to benefit developing and developed nations. When it is safe to do so from a public health perspective New Zealand should again seek to honour its international commitments with regard to refugee quotas. In addition family reunification should be given a higher priority in government policy and settlement criteria.

Aid and Development

24. In the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio we have moved beyond the days when New Zealand’s focus was narrowly confined to a mercantile view that “trade is our foreign policy”. While trade is undoubtedly important. It is not everything. In the 21st century good relations with neighbours and other members in the community of nations are vital. This is very evident in New Zealand’s relationship with our Pacific neighbours. Caritas supports the government’s “Pacific reset” strategy as New Zealand fulfils its responsibility to be a good neighbour in the region.

³ <https://www.cph.co.nz/your-health/mental-illness/>

⁴ <https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/mental-health-and-addictions/budget-2019-mental-health-wellbeing-and-addiction-initiatives>

⁵ Pope Francis, “Fratelli Tutti” (41) 2020.

25. The boost in foreign aid and development funding announced in 2018 will bring New Zealand's ODA to 0.28 per cent of gross national income (GNI) by 2021, up from 0.25 per cent in 2016. But that was well below New Zealand's international commitment to invest 0.7 per cent of GNI on aid.
26. New Zealand is held in high regard in the region due to its reputation for being independent, flexible and fostering a collaborative partnership in the Pacific. To foster the best long term interests of New Zealand and of all Pacific peoples we encourage longer term thinking based on local communities, cultures and respecting the human dignity of all. Such an approach helps to strengthen stability, local economies and self-determination for small island developing states (SIDS).
27. We encourage the government to create a pathway towards meeting its international commitment so that 0.7% of GNI is contributed towards effective aid and development programmes informed by local communities to foster integral human development in the region. This could be achieved by 2024-25 if a start was made in Budget 2021 to move to 0.3% of GNI. New Zealand's spending on Aid has been declining since 2008 when it stood at 0.3% of GNI. Reversing this trend should be a priority for the new government.

Environmental justice

28. We welcome the passage of the government's Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Act and the establishment of the independent Climate Change Commission. But this is only the beginning of continued concerted action required for New Zealand to scale up its climate response quickly for our nation to play its part in the transformation necessary to safeguard the wellbeing of future generations and of communities across the Pacific.
29. Caritas has tracked the impact of climate and other environmental changes over the last decade through a series of seven reports monitoring the State of the Environment for Oceania (SEFO). These reports amplify the voices of Oceania peoples calling for climate justice and for actions to match words. Copies of the reports are available on our website.⁶
30. Two of the major concerns are action to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and protection of our oceans from further damage arising from offshore mining and drilling. In particular, we seek:
- Increased and more effective climate finance in the Pacific, targeting those most affected and with the least resources to help themselves. Local communities must be able to access funds with clear procedures and guidelines; and be involved in the planning, monitoring and implementation of larger projects that affect them.
 - Strong and rapid revision of our Nationally Determined Contribution under the Paris Agreement, after the Climate Change Commission's updated advice expected in 2021. The current NDC seems likely to fall short of New Zealand playing its part to keep global average temperature below the 1.5°C threshold.
 - Preparing for climate displacement/migration both within Aotearoa New Zealand and within the Oceania region, with special consideration for people without sufficient financial resources.
 - New Zealand to ban seabed mining in its territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zone; and seek, through the International Seabed Authority, a global moratorium on deep sea mining and exploration until more is known on the impacts of ecosystems and communities.

⁶ <https://caritas.org.nz/state-environment>

Recommendations

Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand recommends putting in place measures which will advance the common good through the following programme of actions over the next three years:

- Act justly towards tangata whenua through resolution of outstanding Treaty of Waitangi claims.
- Alleviate the housing crisis by funding and facilitating the rapid construction of social housing in both the government and community housing sectors in partnership with iwi and community housing providers.
- Help reduce poverty by simplifying the welfare benefit system and make it easier for people to receive the support they are entitled to.
- Increase benefit levels and increase the minimum wage to ensure all New Zealanders have an income that provides for the necessities of life and can meaningfully participate with dignity in our communities.
- Give hope to young people by encouraging them to enrol and participate in education, training or employment opportunities. Continue to also monitor the availability and effectiveness of mental health programmes to ensure that people who need support with mental health and addiction issues can get it.
- Ensure that education and training leads to productive and rewarding work by promoting greater co-operation and communications between local training and education providers with local employers.
- Support and fund the expansion of effective refugee resettlement schemes to help new arrivals feel welcome, supported and able to integrate well into their new homes.
- Prioritise family reunification in government policy and refugee settlement criteria with existing places being carried over if they were unable to be taken up in 2020 due to Covid19.
- Continue with the “Pacific reset” initiative to help grow New Zealand’s presence with local partners in the Pacific region. Fulfil New Zealand’s international commitments by gradually increasing spending on Aid and development to 0.7% of GNI by 2025/26.
- Accelerate New Zealand’s progress on responding to climate change through ensuring that climate finance can more easily be accessed by grassroots communities that are most impacted; Making rapid progress on the new National Determined Contribution (NDC) to ensure we are going to meet or exceed our international climate commitments; and ban seabed mining in our Exclusive Economic Zone; and seek a global moratorium on deep sea mining and exploration until more is known on the impacts of ecosystems and communities.