

John Key's full speech

23 February 2011

New Zealanders have woken to a tragedy unfolding in the great city of Christchurch.

The earthquake that struck the Canterbury region at ten to one yesterday has wreaked death and destruction on a dreadful scale.

There is no reason that can make sense of this event.

No words that can spare our pain.

We are witnessing the havoc caused by a violent and ruthless act of nature.

Many people have lost their lives. Families have lost their cherished loved ones. Mates have lost their mates.

These deaths are the greatest loss.

They remind us that buildings are just buildings, roads just roads, but our people are irreplaceable.

Today all New Zealanders grieve for you Christchurch.

To all those who woke up in Christchurch today feeling lucky to be alive, we know that you too are shocked, unnerved and grieving.

We know that your loss is sharpened by fear.

Our minds go to the mothers and fathers comforting children struck by anxiety and disbelief.

They go to the elderly, infirm and isolated who experienced this event alone and who remain blunted by shock.

And they go to each and every Cantabrian who has stoically endured six months of aftershocks, only to be hit by the biggest shock of all.

On behalf of New Zealand let me say to all of you: We feel your pain, as only a small nation can, for none of us feel removed from this event.

I am a proud son of Christchurch. I was raised there, I got my first job there, my sister lives there, my mother died there, I know what a wonderful place it is.

But my connection to Christchurch is no rare thing.

All New Zealanders have a piece of our heart in Christchurch.

All of our lives are touched by this event.

A friend or family member who lives there. A time spent studying there or a memorable experience had there.

We feel connected to your suffering. Your tragedy is our tragedy.

Today I want Christchurch to hear this message:

You will get through this.

This proud country is right behind you and we are backing you with all our might.

The world is with us.

Our Australian neighbours, our British and American friends, the great countries of this world, all are putting their shoulder to your wheel. They are sending their support, their expertise, their people to help us.

Christchurch, today is the day your great comeback begins.

Though your buildings are broken, your streets awash, and your hearts are aching, your great spirit will overcome.

While nature has taken much from you, it can not take your survivor's spirit.

This devastating event marks the beginning of a long journey for your city.

It will be a journey that leads us from ruins and despair to hope and new opportunities. From great hardship will come great strength.

It will be a difficult journey, but progress is certain, things will get better, Christchurch will rise again.

On behalf of the Government, let me be clear that no one will be left to walk this journey alone.

New Zealand will walk this journey with you. We will be there every step of the way.

Christchurch; this is not your test, this is New Zealand's test.

I promise we will meet this test.

Today and tomorrow our focus must be on preserving lives, on rescuing those who are trapped and treating those who are injured.

We pay tribute to the hundreds of search and rescue workers, emergency personnel, medical professionals and each and every person who is contributing to this effort.

You are heroes amongst us.

Already the bravery and resilience of Canterbury is on show.

In the weeks ahead our journey will take us to new obstacles, new challenges.

We have a city to rebuild. We have peoples' livelihoods to restore. We have a community's confidence to inspire.

We will rise to these challenges.

We will rebuild this city resolutely, and with the conviction that this is what it is to be a Cantabrian, what it is to be a New Zealander.

We are a country of pioneers. Whether we came by waka, sailboat, or aeroplane, we came with the conviction that we could build a new life in this country.

That great pioneering spirit will come to the fore in Christchurch over the coming months and years.

Though lost lives will never be replaced, and though your city will never look the same again, you **will** rebuild your city, you **will** rebuild your lives, you **will** overcome.

We have seen many cities in the world come back from disasters on this scale, and Christchurch will be no exception.

I know that all New Zealanders stand ready to help.

Right now, we can help by rallying around those who are grieving, supporting those whose livelihoods are in peril.

My message to all Kiwis who want to help is - act on that desire.

No act of kindness is too small.

Right now, you can help by offering support to friends and family who are hurting. Offer them a bed or a roof over their head if that is what they need. Make your donations to help those who have been hit hardest.

As infrastructure recovers, your visits to Christchurch will be welcome.

Above all, throughout this journey, offer those affected your love. Know that your humanity is more powerful than any act of nature.

As we look to the future, New Zealanders should know that the Government is going to do everything we can to support the recovery and rebuilding of Christchurch.

We are a resilient nation, and we will not bow down to this challenge.

Now let me turn to events of today.

In the past half hour, I have been advised by the Police commander on the ground, Superintendent Dave Cliff, of the latest information available on the loss of life.

I need to emphasise that this information remains under constant review and will be updated during the course of the day.

I am advised that the Police have confirmed 75 fatalities at this point, 55 of whom have been identified.

There are many others missing, the status of which remains unknown.

I have just finished chairing an Emergency Cabinet Meeting, the third since the earthquake struck less than 24 hours ago.

At Cabinet today Ministers received the latest advice on the situation on the ground and discussed all elements of the rescue and recovery.

Cabinet agreed with the decision made under Civil Defence legislation by the Minister to declare a national state of emergency.

As required by the legislation, John Carter will make a statement to Parliament this afternoon.

I have been in contact with Mayor Bob Parker to inform him of the decision, and to reiterate my assurance that central Government will provide all necessary resources to deal with this natural disaster.

I have also spoken by telephone with Leader of the Opposition Phil Goff to inform him of this decision and I also thanked him for his efforts on the ground in Christchurch.

In practice this enables the strongest possible focus of local, national and international resources working together to achieve the best possible response in the shortest timeframe.

Under the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act, this declaration means the Director of Civil Defence Emergency Management John Hamilton may control the exercise and performance of functions, duties, and powers of CDEM Groups and Group controllers. There are no other differences between the powers under a state of local emergency and a state of national emergency.

Of course, these powers will be exercised working in close support of and cooperation with Bob Parker and the Christchurch Civil Defence team.

At the end of this press conference I will be leaving for the airport to once again travel to Christchurch.

I expect to arrive at about 1pm, and I will go directly to Civil Defence Headquarters to meet with Bob Parker and be updated on the situation.

I would like to, if possible, visit some of the welfare centres that have been established.

It is also my hope to be able to survey the damage in Lyttelton in some way.

I intend to return to Wellington tonight for further meetings with Ministers.

I'd like to take a moment now to acknowledge the international offers of help we have received, and to thank our friends around the globe for their sympathy and support.

I have spoken with several leaders since the Earthquake and we have received messages from all over the world. I cannot note them all right now simply because there are so many. But I have been touched by the support.

There have been foreign nationals caught up in this disaster and it is possible that some of the fatalities from this earthquake are visitors to New Zealand.

Foreign Affairs officials are providing all the support they can to consular staff from other countries, as they work to assist their own nationals caught up in the disaster.

To date, we have accepted offers of assistance from Australia, the United States, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Japan and Taiwan. We are constantly assessing the requirements in Christchurch and have offers of help from many other countries pending at this point which we are keeping under review.

A statement will be coming from Foreign Minister Murray McCully's office shortly outlining further details of this overseas assistance.