

**Speech by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Rt. Hon. Winston Peters, to the French Institute of International Relations (Ifri), Paris, 26 November 2024**

The Path Less Travelled

Before beginning today, we would like to acknowledge the French Institute of International Relations. You have contributed to debates about international affairs over a long period of time, and we thank you for hosting us.

Can we also thank the Institute's founder and Chairman, Thierry de Montbrial, and Deputy Director Marc Hecker, for their support arranging this event, and welcome dignitaries from the French Government and members of the Diplomatic Corps today.

.....

It is a pleasure to be talking with you today in Paris. Indeed, it's a pleasure *any* day to be in Paris, home to one the world's great cities and the seat of one of Europe's oldest democracies.

We in New Zealand share the same democratic pulse as France, although our democracy was born of evolution rather than in the revolutions that fuelled the early French Republics, before events, and more evolutionary change responding to them, led ultimately to today's long-standing Fifth Republic.

New Zealand is proud of being one of the world's oldest continuous democracies, having established responsible government in 1854. New Zealand and France's successful democratic evolutionary paths give the truth to Rousseau's quip that while 'patience is bitter, its fruit is sweet'.

Now, after each national election it may not always seem the fruit is sweet, but the ideas underpinning our democracies – liberté, égalité, and fraternité – are, and they still drive the direction of our respective democratic discourses and our politics.

The tension between freedom and equality dictates the movement of our politics, alternating between periods dominated by the rights of the few and those dominated by the needs of the many. That is a familiar tension in our politics, whether in Paris or Wellington.

For a New Zealander, however, what stands out in France's tripartite motto is fraternité. Rather than rights, which liberté and égalité invoke, fraternité speaks more to a moral obligation, a responsibility of government to protect all of their citizens and provide them with the conditions to prosper. It also speaks to the fraternal bonds forged within the community of citizens who comprise the state.

It is the spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood, of national identity and unity, that gives fraternité its richness and promise.

Fraternité is harder to relate to New Zealand's political system, but it does very much capture the fraternal bonds that exists between New Zealand and its neighbours, the Pacific community of nations that are scattered across the Pacific and the place we call home.

It extends to the fraternal bonds we feel towards all nations, nations like France, who have embraced the common cause of defending freedom and the democratic ideal we, however imperfectly, seek to advance.

We'll return to fraternité and especially its place in the Pacific shortly. But first we'd like to speak to the Foreign Policy Reset that New Zealand has pursued with vigour since the Coalition Government's formation a year ago, and what it means for our relationship with France, in both Paris and in the Pacific.

.....

Since coming into office as New Zealand's Foreign Minister for a third time, spanning the past three decades, it has never been more apparent just how much diplomacy and the tools of statecraft matter in our troubled world.

We have observed throughout the year that the ability to talk with, rather than at, each other has never been more needed. In the twelve months since the Coalition Government was formed, our extensive programme of international engagements reinforces that those who share our values, and even those who do not, gain from understanding each other's position, even when we cannot agree.

From understanding comes opportunity and from diplomacy comes compromise, of meeting each other halfway, which is the key building block of better relations between nations. We have said wherever we have travelled this year that we need more diplomacy, more engagement, more compromise.

We live in troubled times, with the strategic environment deteriorating more rapidly than in any of our lifetimes. Tectonic shifts unfolding in the global distribution of power, economic might, and strategic influence have upended old assumptions, while the rules-based order is under severe and sustained assault.

New Zealand sees three big shifts underpinning the multi-faceted and complex challenges facing us today. They are:

- **From rules to power**, a shift towards a multipolar world that is characterized by more contested rules and where the relative power between states assumes a greater role in shaping international affairs.
- **From economics to security**, a shift in which economic relationships are reassessed in light of increased military competition in a more securitized and less stable world.
- **And from efficiency to resilience**, where we see a shift in the drivers of economic behaviour, and where building greater resilience and addressing pressing social and sustainability issues become more prominent.

These shifts present challenges for a small trade-dependent country like New Zealand. Some of these challenges are familiar, but others, those mostly driven by technology, are new.

Indeed each generation of decision-makers confronts new challenges as economies, demographics, technologies, and societies evolve, as do the power calculations that accompany disruptive change.

Benign becomes malign. Old truths give way to new ones. The trick now, as it was then, is to have one's eyes wide open about the fundamental shifts that are taking place and be nimble enough in government, and through government support systems, to adapt to them.

Turning now to the opportunities we see. Our Cabinet endorsed early in its term a foreign policy reset that would reinvigorate and bring greater focus to our foreign, defence and trade policy agendas.

We have since coming into government pursued with urgency a foreign policy that:

- Significantly increases its focus on, and resources applied to, South East Asia and India.
- Re-engages and reinvigorates our relationships with traditional and like-minded partners like France.
- Sustains our deep focus on the Pacific and re-energizes our 2018 Pacific Reset by working with Pacific leaders and through the Pacific Islands Forum to bolster development and security cooperation across the Pacific.
- Targets multilateral engagement to global or transboundary issues where we have direct interests or where core New Zealand values and freedoms are at stake.
- Navigates impasses or blockages in the multilateral system to support new groupings of like-minded partners that can more efficiently advance and defend our interests and capabilities.
- Promotes the Coalition Government's goal of effecting a serious step change in export value over the next decade through active economic diplomacy to drive export growth.

To achieve this ambitious agenda, we knew we needed to give more energy, more urgency, and a sharper focus to three inter-connected lines of effort:

- Investing in our relationships.
- Growing our prosperity.

- And strengthening our security.

We have from day one hit the ground running because we had a lot of ground to make up. We wanted New Zealand's voice to be heard by the world again.

During the first year of this term as Foreign Minister, we have visited 35 countries, several more than once, engaged with 54 counterparts, had in excess of 300 political engagements, and met with 46 Foreign Heads of Mission, covering the vast majority of New Zealand's export markets and our diplomatic partnerships. We've been busy, having spent 110 days out of the country, and counting.

.....

Turning to Franco-New Zealand relations, we see France as one of our anchor relationships. We are likeminded and aligned in our interests and values, globally, and in the Pacific. We share a commitment to the liberal rules-based order, multilateralism, trade and a free, stable and prosperous international order.

We have forged an enduring friendship that next year will celebrate its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We have spilled blood together defending freedom during two World Wars.

Our people-to-people links are strong, including through tourism and always combative encounters in Olympic stadia or on the rugby pitch, as we witnessed with France's victory over the All Blacks here in Paris just last week.

At a time when there is a backlash against trade liberalisation, the NZ-EU Free Trade Agreement shows that free trade need not compromise sovereignty and rights.

New Zealand and France have strong bilateral ties in research, science, and technology, including with indigenous partners. New Zealand's association with Pillar 2 of Horizon Europe in 2023 is providing additional opportunities for collaboration.

The Christchurch Call has also been an important element of the bilateral relationship over the past five years and we have welcomed President Macron's support fighting the pernicious and malignant spread of mis-and-disinformation, and worse.

You will be aware that President Macron and Prime Minister Luxon jointly announced the establishment of the Christchurch Call Foundation in May, signalling the next phase of this work.

.....

The foundation of our foreign policy reset is our collaboration with longstanding partners, those who we know best and with whom we have deep reservoirs of trust. France is one such country, and by working together, we can make a difference.

Our strategic and our economic interests are most acutely engaged in the Indo-Pacific. The economics are obvious: South and Southeast Asia is an incredibly dynamic part of the world, which is sustaining economic growth at rates of more than 5% of GDP - year-in, year-out.

But we confront a range of security challenges, with potential flashpoints in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait. We are also deeply concerned by North Korea's evolving nuclear capability and ambition. Those concerns are heightened by its supply of troops to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, another flagrant breach of international law and UN resolutions.

Accordingly, New Zealand welcomes France's intention to join the Multilateral Sanctions Monitoring Team mechanism, which will investigate and report on violations of UN sanctions against North Korea.

Nowhere is Franco-New Zealand cooperation more salient, however, than in the Pacific. The relentless securitisation of the Pacific and a breakdown in long-standing cooperation norms in Antarctica mean New Zealand cannot stay out of the way of geopolitics.

The region faces more sustained strategic competition and challenges than at any time during the past 80 years. Pressure is being exerted across the vast Blue Continent, as beachheads are sought and influence peddled.

New Zealand therefore sustains an intense focus on our Pacific neighbourhood. That means listening to their priorities and partnering with them on real solutions. By year's end we hope to have travelled to all 17 other Pacific Island Forum countries, hearing first-hand about their challenges and learning about how we can most effectively help.

Some island nations also face an existential threat from environmental factors. And the other needs of the region are significant – including infrastructure deficits, concerning GDP forecasts, still limited access to power and internet services, along with health and education services.

As a country, we've got the tools to make a big impact. The ongoing focus of our international development cooperation to the Pacific will continue to accentuate the importance of mature and respectful discussions on sensitive issues, and our intention to step up our defence, security, and trade engagement with the region.

Pacific regionalism sits at the core of New Zealand's Pacific approach. We acknowledge the critical role played by the Pacific Islands Forum, to



bolster regional development and security and to use our collective voice to hold bigger countries to account.

But New Zealand cannot meet these needs alone. We will increasingly look to cooperate with our traditional partners like France and other close partners who share our values and interests.

We want to deepen our cooperation with France to advance Pacific priorities, to strengthen existing regional architecture, to protect the international rules-based order, and to ensure the prosperity of future Pacific generations.

As the only European Union Member State with territories in the Pacific region, France too has a deep history and genuine interest in the Pacific. As the region's largest European donor, France has contributed extensively to the development objectives of the region.

It is a member and funder of two regional organisations – the Pacific Community and the Secretariat of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme. We also welcome France stepping up its presence through a significant increase in aid expenditure and the opening of a new French Embassy in Samoa.

France is one of our most important and versatile partners in the Pacific. It possesses a permanent and meaningful diplomatic, development, military and humanitarian capability in the region which has proven invaluable, particularly in response to natural disasters.

We already cooperate across a range of areas. There exists a strong track record in humanitarian assistance and disaster response through the trilateral France-Australia-New Zealand (FRANZ) arrangement, signed in 1992, to provide disaster reconnaissance and relief assistance to Pacific partners.

This is a civilian-led arrangement that is supported by defence forces, when appropriate. Successful examples of FRANZ cooperation include responses to Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin in Vanuatu in March 2023, and Tropical Cyclone Lola in October 2023.

New Zealand has been pleased to provide \$5 million of support to the Kiwa Initiative, a €75m climate resilience programme, which provides simplified access to funding and technical assistance for projects in the Pacific; and the Pacific humanitarian warehouse project, which will help the region be better prepared for, and more resilient to, disasters.

In 2024, New Zealand was pleased to join France on the Executive Board for the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR). We commend France for joining the GFCR coalition early, in 2021, and for contributing significantly to the grant fund. Coral reefs are essential to the wellbeing of coastal communities around the world, and we are happy to be working with France on this blended finance initiative that seeks to leverage investment from partners.

France is also a member of the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting and hosted the meeting last year in New Caledonia. It participated in this year's event, hosted by New Zealand in Auckland.

Following the recent outbreak of unrest in New Caledonia, France and New Zealand defence and civilian personnel worked closely and tirelessly to facilitate the assisted departure of New Zealanders and foreign citizens.

France has decided to increase its development spending in the region at a time of competing priorities closer to home and amidst a period of fiscal constraint. They have €200m earmarked for the Pacific for 2024–2027. We cannot overstate the value we attach to France's financial commitment to the region.

France’s development support in the Pacific is predominantly spent in the French Pacific territories, Vanuatu and PNG. Support to the French Pacific Territories is wide ranging – in promoting infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare, and private sector development – while France’s aid to PNG and Vanuatu is targeted more towards climate change and biodiversity projects.

In PNG, France is supporting the integration of renewable energy into the power grid and contributing to the ‘greening’ of the Port of Rabaul through the funding of a feasibility study.

In July 2023, President Macron and PNG Prime Minister Marape launched a US\$66m EU-funded, French-delivered deforestation project in PNG. This is an exemplary example of France’s leadership leveraging European Union funding for the Pacific region.

In Vanuatu, France is supporting climate forecasting through the €4m CLIPSSA programme and delivering sustainable waste management projects.

France will host the UN Oceans Conference in Nice in June 2025, and we acknowledge France’s global leadership on oceans issues.

The European Union is the seventh largest donor to the region and a long-standing and likeminded partner, particularly on climate change. While only present in Fiji and PNG, we welcome the EU strengthening its relationship with the Pacific, including through the Samoa Agreement, a new framework to address global challenges with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries.

.....

We call the Pacific home because New Zealand is a Pacific country, linked by history, culture, politics, demographics and indeed DNA. Over a quarter of New Zealanders have Māori or Pasifika heritage, and this demographic is fast growing. These are basic facts, and they have profound influence on how the New Zealand Government regards the Pacific region.

We see the Pacific as a family of nations and like any family each member wants to stand on their own two feet, as an equal. And that is how we view them, and how we hope to be viewed, as equals.

Our Pacific community are overwhelmingly comprised of small states, so we share many of the same challenges. And New Zealand believes that small states matter, so drawing strength from each other is the essence of fraternité in our region.

Within these fraternal bonds, we come together to support each other during difficult times, work together on many areas of common interest, while exhibiting our unity and diversity in moments of national triumph or celebration.

Thus, when we talk of the centrality of the Pacific Islands Forum, it is because that is where our family of nations come together to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing our vast region.

Importantly, when it comes to how New Zealand can best play its role within our Pacific family, we have realised that we can do much more together with, and in, the Pacific by working collaboratively with partners than any single country can hope to achieve on its own.

More effective collaboration among like-minded countries boosts the opportunities to scale up our Pacific ambitions, allowing us to contemplate projects that on our own we could not.

Like-minded countries with Pacific interests must improve their coordination and raise their ambition for what can be achieved collaboratively. That is the key to enduring and successful change. The stakes are too high and the challenges too urgent for us to be duplicating each other's efforts or competing against each other for projects.

We need to talk more and raise our collective sights. Aligning and working with partners in service of Pacific priorities is critical, which fuels New Zealand's desire to increase our cooperation with France across a range of trade, defence, security, and political areas in the Pacific, as well as in the Indo-Pacific, and globally.

We want to collaborate with partners like France in the service of Pacific priorities and towards a peaceful, stable, prosperous, and resilient region. New Zealand serves as a bridge to partners wanting to understand the Pacific and provide assistance to our region.

Pacific countries and territories, and the blue continent surrounding them, hold immense human and natural resource, the well-being of which is critical to the world's overall resilience and prosperity.

Hence our prioritisation of senior-level political visits to the Pacific this year, including, where we can, taking parliamentary colleagues from across New Zealand's political parties to reinforce that our friendship is bipartisan in nature and that our Pacific focus is enduring.

Pacific regionalism sits at the core of our Pacific approach. Here we again acknowledge the critical role played by the Pacific Islands Forum, to bolster regional development and security and to use our collective voice to hold bigger countries to account.

As a Pacific country and as a founding Pacific Islands Forum member, we are committed to advancing the Pacific’s priorities, as set out by Pacific Leaders in their 2050 strategy.

New Zealand hosted the inaugural Forum meeting in 1971 in Wellington, and for over half a century we have placed the Pacific at the heart of our diplomacy. We will continue to seek to address the region’s challenges, in close alignment with Pacific Leaders’ priorities.

Already, 60 percent of New Zealand’s \$1 billion annual International Development Cooperation funding is allocated to the Pacific Islands region, to improve its sustainable development and reduce poverty. This includes at least half of our climate financing funding through 2025.

The Pacific voice is important and talanoa – the Pacific way of coming together for talks and discussion – must be regular and meaningful. The ongoing focus of our international development cooperation to the Pacific will continue to accentuate the importance of mature and respectful discussions on sensitive issues, and our intention to step up our defence, security, and trade engagement with the region.

But New Zealand cannot meet these needs alone. We will increasingly look to cooperate with our traditional partners and other close partners who share our values and interests.

We see France as a key partner in the Pacific because we have a close bilateral relationship, and shared values. We are friends. We share similar assessments of the challenges facing the world, the Indo-Pacific, and the Pacific, and know we need to effectively work together to address them.

.....

Challenges and opportunity lie ahead for the choices facing France and New Caledonia over their future together. For together, we strongly believe, must be their future. That is what we want to see happen.

New Caledonia is New Zealand's closest neighbour. What happens there matters to New Zealand. They, like us, are members of the Pacific Islands Forum, so are part of our Pacific family. So, we have fraternal bonds with New Caledonia. As we do with France.

We have been saddened by the loss of life, the violence, the destruction and the economic damage that has befallen New Caledonia this year. As we said back in May: no matter your views on the political arrangements in New Caledonia, everyone should agree that violence is harmful to every community there.

We believe that France plays a vital role in the Pacific. Before trouble broke out in New Caledonia, the French territories were among the best performing economies in the region. That would not have been possible without France's economic support.

New Zealand, as an isolated set of trading islands, just north of the Antarctic, has relied upon France maintaining open sea lanes around its Pacific territories, providing maritime security for our exporters.

We welcome France's efforts to restore security in New Caledonia, and we were extremely grateful for their assistance in helping New Zealand get its citizens as well as other foreign nationals out of Nouméa when trouble did break out.

That action, undertaken during a security crisis, spoke to the strength of our friendship.

We especially welcomed France allowing the Pacific Island Forum troika plus team into New Caledonia for its fact-finding mission and applaud renewed attempts by the French Government to establish dialogue among all New Caledonians.

The issues in New Caledonia run deep, as befits its history. Rising Pacific nationalism is something we have closely observed since the mid-to-late 1980s, so the direction it's taken, while sometimes confronting, is not surprising. The challenge, then, as now, is to create a new pathway that meets the ambitions and aspirations of all New Caledonians of all backgrounds.

In forging a new and more adaptive path, one is reminded of the American poet Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken'. The poem ends with the lines:

'Two roads diverged in a wood,

And I –

I took the one less travelled by,

And that has made all the difference'.

The Matignon-Oudinot Agreements in 1988, followed by the Nouméa Accord a decade later, represented that road less travelled, one where France and New Caledonia walked together. But now, in 2024, that road has become overgrown and blocked by choices already made and actions already taken.

However, another truism is that once a path has been chosen, it's impossible to ever return to the original point of intersection again, because that path has forever changed.

We therefore think that in Nouméa and Paris, the key to restore the spirit of earlier understandings is for all parties to have open minds about their



next crucial choice, about a new path forward, because France and the people of New Caledonia stand at a new turning point.

In finding a new pathway forward, the means of getting there at this point are most important. In other words, 'how' France and all the parties in New Caledonia talk and work together at this delicate moment in time is crucial to determining their ultimate direction.

In respect to ends, while the past cannot be reclaimed, we think the opportunity is for a new path to be forged. So rather than dwell on old questions, we think there is an opening for everyone who cares about New Caledonia to use our imaginations to think of a new question, one that breaks free of the past while offering new possibilities for the future.

There are all sorts of constitutional models out there, including across the Pacific. For instance, New Zealand has learned from its experience of having different types of constitutional relationships with realm countries, the Cook Islands, Niue, and Tokelau.

Our realm relationships are stable and mutually beneficial, so enduring, and the constitutional mechanisms provide for maximum self-determination while ensuring that New Zealand's security and defence interests remain protected.

We have been happy to share these experiences in Paris and Nouméa, where that has been helpful.

We deeply respect France's role in our region, and we are in no doubt that the economic might of France is essential to reestablishing a vibrant New Caledonian economy.

We stand ready to help in any way we can, and we trust France appreciates, to cite Rousseau again, that 'there is nothing better than the

encouragement of a good friend', because that is the animating spirit behind our words today.

.....

To conclude, New Zealand's foreign policy reset is our local response to the challenges we face near and far. Diplomacy matters more than ever, and we have injected ours with the urgency these troubling times demand.

We consider France's engagement in the Pacific crucial to meeting the security and economic challenges we face across our Blue Continent. In challenging times such as we face, friends are important, so we wish to collaborate more with France and other nations who share our values and who think them worth promoting while defending them against those who prefer control and power over collaboration and persuasion.

The future is not fixed, so our foreign policy reset, across the Pacific, Southeast Asia, in Europe and elsewhere, has us wanting to do more with France, and with those who think our values are worth defending, so that all are free to forge their own futures, in their own way.

To paraphrase a great statesman, Jimmy Carter, the Pacific is a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different dreams.

So we must work together to build a future as vibrant as the Pacific people themselves. That is both our challenge and responsibility, so let's seize the moment and let loose our imaginations to create a better Pacific and a better world.

Thank you.

ENDS