Rt Hon John Key

Prime Minister

18 March 2011

Speech

Speech to National Memorial Service North Hagley Park

We are here today to remember the people we have lost, to express our grief and sorrow, and to re-affirm our commitment to this city and to each other.

On the 22nd of February Christchurch experienced an earthquake of such violence that it stole from us the lives of dozens of people, and dramatically altered the lives of tens of thousands more.

All who were caught up in that earthquake, all who have seen the images and read the stories, have been horrified by it its scale and by its callous disregard for so much that we held dear.

It felled buildings, destroyed roads, caused terrible injuries and tore up the very earth we walk upon.

It has left scars that will never be erased from our land, or from our hearts.

Today, in the aftermath of this tragedy, and reminded of life's fragility, we come together to share in the unbreakable strength of the ties that bind us.

The ties that bind the community of Christchurch, and that bind us as citizens of New Zealand and of the world.

Above all we remember those who lives were abruptly taken because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is no justification for their deaths.

No fairness for why it should have been them.

Instead we must join their families and loved ones in remembering the lives that were lost

They came from all walks of life and were mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters and brothers.

Many were foreign students who had chosen to pursue their education and dreams here.

Some were travellers.

They were only visiting for a short time.

New Zealanders have come to know many of the stories behind the names of the dead.

We mourn their loss and our hearts in particular go out to their children, spouses, parents, friends and families.

I know there are many of you here today.

We do not know your pain as you do, but your experience haunts us.

I can only say to you that New Zealand is here for you, and we hold you in our hearts.

We are conscious that we are united in our loss with families in more than 20 countries whose fate was to have a loved one far, far from home at the time the earthquake struck.

We say to those families that we embrace them as part of the wider New Zealand community.

Your family members have become part of the story of this city, and of this country, and we will remember your loved ones as we will remember our own.

So let us today, in our numbers, and in our solidarity, honour those who died as a result of the February 22 earthquake.

Let us remember them.

They are the faces of a Christchurch that will never be as it was again.

The earthquake of February 22, 2011, has altered forever the lives of all those who live here.

No words or deeds can change that.

So today, we remember Christchurch as it was, and we treasure that memory.

As we focus here today on our own loss we are also aware that a week ago an earthquake and ferocious tsunami was unleashed on Japan.

All around the world people have been scarcely able to believe the images they have seen.

Even today, as we mourn here, we think of Japan's desperate plight.

For the people of Christchurch who have lived through two large earthquakes and many thousands of aftershocks these images from Japan bring flooding back the raw emotions and pain that accompanies such a devastating event

They add to the increased sense of anxiety about your own personal security and your future.

So let me say to each and every one of you that these emotions are completely normal and understandable

It is only natural that you want things to simply go back the way they were.

That is a very human desire – to feel the familiar again.

To be angry that your loved one will never return

To long to hear again the sounds of joy and excitement that once filled your homes and your hearts

Most of all I know this is a time of great uncertainty

And I know that such uncertainty makes recovery from this earthquake slow, painful and difficult.

But today I also want to talk not only of loss, but also of hope, and healing.

From the first moments after the February 22 earthquake struck Christchurch, the response has been tremendous.

There were people, alerted by the sight or cries of total strangers, who went immediately to their aid.

People dug other people out of rubble, carried bleeding strangers to cars, driven by other strangers, who drove them to aid offered by yet another they didn't know.

It simply is not possible to list all the ways that people have supported each other, not only because they were neighbours, colleagues, family or friends, but simply because they were fellow humans, and in desperate need.

That co-operation has spread well beyond Christchurch.

The country has rallied magnificently.

Strangers, as well as friends and families, have opened their homes, and have helped in many ways.

And it goes beyond our shores.

We are deeply appreciative to have here today Prince William,

Representatives from many governments, and also, from Australia, the Governor-General, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition.

On behalf of all New Zealanders, I thank you for being here today.

And personally I thank you too.

We are moved by your presence at this memorial service.

Many governments sent rescue teams and other personnel to work alongside the New Zealand rescue services, and for that unstinting service, we also today say thank you.

Whether it's been an Urban Search and Rescue team, or whether it's been someone taking their neighbour's water containers to be filled, the assistance which has been given to the people of Christchurch has been of enormous practical benefit, and has lifted our spirits when we most needed it.

To the Police, the Army, urban search and rescue teams, medical teams, Civil

Defence, the farmy army, the student army, and to all those workers toiling so hard to repair the infrastructure we are indebted.

On behalf of all New Zealanders, I say thank you.

I also pay tribute to the resilience of every Christchurch citizen who has done what must be done, who has resisted despair and had the bravery to go on. These have been such difficult days.

Here in the beautiful Hagley Park today we see the face of a city that is broken but not beaten.

Let us today re-commit ourselves to the resolve to rise again.

The royal commission will, we hope, provide us with answers and guidance about the toll the earthquake took on people and property.

So too will scientists and engineers.

We need to learn from the tragedy of February 22, although there are many things we have learned already.

We have learned the power not only of individuals who have done more than they ever dreamed they could have, but also the power of a community, whether it's a neighbourhood, a school, a nation or the international community.

We have witnessed in these past three weeks the very best of the human spirit.

We have seen the coming together of a city, and of a nation.

We have learned a lot about our capacity to do good.

There is much talk that ours is a selfish generation, focussed only on money and individual gain.

What I have seen in our country, and especially here in this city since February 22 puts the lie to that.

I have seen people who are resilient, capable, practical and compassionate.

New Zealanders have been generous and brave.

And we are resolute.

This city will be rebuilt.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for being here today.

Thank you for caring.

That makes you part of the story of rebuilding Christchurch.