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**VISIT OF THE NEW ZEALAND EMBASSY IN PARIS :**

**A REPORT**

Par Claire GUYOT



**LES JEUNES  
IHEDN**

# ABOUT THE VISIT

On December 4th 2019, a few members of the Asia-Oceania study group and of the Junior Diplomat Initiative were lucky enough to meet policy advisors Ms. Liese Galvin, Mr. Charles Kingston and Mr. Thomas Konterski at the New Zealand embassy in Paris. They initiated this interactive discussion by underlining how the starting point for the New Zealand France relationship is a sense of shared values. During the first World War, New Zealand forces joined the effort in France to help defend the values of freedom. This still echoes in the two countries' current conversation and collaboration, may it be in the fight against terrorism, in combating climate change, standing up for human rights... Therefore, characterising the France-New Zealand relationship now would come down to the reflection of a likeminded-ness: both countries take international and domestic leadership on common pressing issues, thus showing a convergence of values. When the Prime Minister of New Zealand came to France in April 2018 for her first bilateral visit, a joint declaration between New Zealand and France was concluded: it is a roadmap that sets goals and provides a backdrop for the achievements and headline issues between the two nations working in tandem. This introduction heralded conducive conditions for a mind-broadening encounter.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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*It does not represent the expression of an official opinion.*

## New Zealand's perspective and position in international diplomacy

Ms. Jane Coombs, the Ambassador, gave an address to our group and shared her insightful views on diplomacy and New Zealand's role:

"Diplomacy is an extraordinary mixture between being the most ancient of arts and also the most modern. I think of the traditions and the history of it here, particularly in Paris, given that France has a well-deserved reputation as one of the original designers of diplomacy. When we deal with all the ceremony and the protocol, there is something very old-fashioned about the art of diplomacy. I guess at a time when borders and distances were so impenetrable or so vast, you didn't need to have individuals to conduct business and to try to have voices heard and relationships created across borders and across distances. But now, we have also become the most modern of professions because with digitalisation and globalisation, of course, our worlds are so much more connected and so you might wonder: 'what's the point now of having diplomats?' It is true that the role has changes very much, but I think I would argue that it has become as important if not arguably more because what we've learnt about this modern age is that there very little a country does by itself. Most issues require global or at least shared, combined approaches. When I think about the work that I have done over my career, it has actually changed very much from an old-fashioned conception, being sort of the eyes, ears and scribe of a country, trying to explain what's going on across boundaries to people working on almost every issues of domestic policy-making. I look at them and think about just what our team here is doing from working with the French on the Christchurch call as a new global approach to dealing with terrorist and violent content online, to working with other European partners to try and design a New Zealand-Europe free trade agreement that will not only allow us to send goods, services and people across borders, but also to develop new rules to support positive environmental outcomes for example, through to what we do in the bilateral relationship. We work at building relationships of influence over time by doing concrete things together, in the Pacific by working together with France on humanitarian disaster relief for example. The list of things that we actually collaborate on has just exploded so I would say that our jobs have become more challenging, more interesting, at a time when the stakes are pretty high and therefore more challenging. First, we all talk about the climate crisis. Global action needs to be taken. Secondly, for a New Zealand diplomat, strengthening multilateralism is of paramount importance, which is why working in France is essential, where we have a partner who, like us, continues to believe in a rules-based world. And then thirdly, I would say that our neighbourhood remains a top priority for New Zealand. That takes us to the Pacific and to that enormous expanse of the world which we live in. The Pacific is actually, I like to say, one third of the world, and what is fascinating and complicated area it is with all its micro-States. And the Ocean plays as much a role in diplomacy as our countries. And the list could go on, but I won't go too much beyond it, because maybe the final point

to make for a New Zealand diplomat is that we like to be as involved, as engaged and as present in the world as we can because we are just long-standing, committed activists in terms of being engaged and open. And at the same time, we always have to balance at against: "what are our resources? what are our ability to make a difference?" And so you'll see us always wanting to be quite selective about the issues that we apply ourselves to, so that we can have impact. So these were all the things I wanted to share with you as I thought about our wonderful profession. I feel very privileged myself to represent my country, a country that we can feel particularly proud of."

## France-New Zealand relationship and the impact of European issues from a New Zealand perspective

The diplomats talked about the key themes evoked in the aforementioned joint declaration, such as climate change and multilateralism. In terms of the European issues from a New Zealand perspective, the latter shares a value system with the continent and Europe is one of the biggest trading block in the world. There are both diplomatic and economic interests. One of the salient aspects of the relationship between New Zealand and Europe is to conclude a free-trade agreement with the European Union. The Embassy works on this with France, a key member State in the European Union: this requires gathering French officials' and other stakeholders' views on different sector interests, basically making the case for active support in the negotiation with the European Commission. The goal is also to ensure a continuous understanding of what the stakes are, so that when the negotiations are concluded, all member States, including France, are in a position to support the outcome. New Zealand does not negotiate with France, but with the Commission: they are the ones that have the competence to negotiate free-trade agreements. The Embassy works very closely with France, and this includes many travels between Brussels and Paris along with steadfast communication.

In regard to the diverse relationship between New Zealand and France, the Rainbow Warrior attack did have an impact on the relationship. In 1985, there was nuclear testing from France in the South Pacific. The Greenpeace flagship, the Rainbow Warrior, got sunk in Auckland harbour by explosives and one person died. The ship was on its way to a protest against a planned French nuclear test in Moruroa, an atoll located in French Polynesia. France took responsibility for the attack after two French secret service agents were caught. The country had to pay 7 million dollars for the damages to the UN Security Council. The relationship between the two countries was undergoing a sticky patch at the time but today, this event does not come up. It is not part of the conversation today.

## Diplomatic case studies: the Christchurch attacks and climate change

The fight against climate change and terrorism are two pressing issues, and none is handled in a detrimental way to the other.

Climate change already has a deep global impact, especially in the Pacific. Although one may contend it to be a long-term issue, action actually has to be taken now in order to curb greenhouse gas emissions. We are in a position to try and meet our objective to become carbon-neutral by 2050. Setting the priority on climate change does not overshadow our engagement on counter-terrorism. The effort put in one issue fosters the bilateral collaboration that is essential for the other.

The Christchurch terrorist attacks demonstrate how international law and diplomatic relations hold much sway in the aftermath. Earlier this year, gun-shooting in a mosque was perpetrated in two separate sites. 51 people were killed and 49 injured. The key theme in which the New Zealand Embassy got involved is the Christchurch call-to-action. It was an initiative that New Zealand co-led with France to mitigate the dissemination of the attack being essentially spread through the Internet. This attack was live-streamed on Facebook and seen 4 000 times. After 24 hours, 1.5 million comments were uploaded on the video. It had to be taken down from the platform. The attacker used the Internet as a weapon. This was a wake-up call for both tech companies and governments. The New Zealand Prime Minister was determined to act quickly. New Zealand worked a lot on dealing with the attack, working with communities and victims. A particular diplomatic initiative the New Zealand Embassy got involved in was the Christchurch call to action. It was really focused on trying to stop that widespread Internet contagion. The New Zealand Embassy worked with France to invite a group of world leaders to Paris to announce an agreement to commit governments and technology companies to ascertain a series of steps that would prevent this phenomenon from happening again. It led towards practical, focused and targeted actions in an area that was kind of new to New Zealand and its Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The technological aspect of it is very complex: when talks about regulating the Internet are initiated, freedom of expression arises. The Internet is a fundamentally amazing tool, but it can also open a dangerous path, particularly for governments out there that have an oppressive regime. A balance needs to be found. The key elements in the Christchurch call-to-action was the creation of a coalition of countries who commit to an array of measures, such as: "developing tools to prevent the upload of terrorist and violent extremist content, countering the roots of violent extremism, increasing transparency around the detection and removal of content, ensuring that algorithms designed and used by companies do not direct users to violent extremist content, in order to make it less viral"<sup>1</sup>. Key technology companies agreed to engage, and came to Paris in order to exchange in an open, free and frank manner. An agreement on a meaningful outcome was very much needed. The important role civil society was going

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mt.ambafrance.org/The-Christchurch-Call-to-Action-to-eliminate-terrorist-and-violent-extremist>

to play also had to be acknowledged. Diplomats from the Embassy worked on each tenants of this initiative. The meeting itself in Paris involved a meeting with Prime Minister Ardern and King Abdullah of Jordan with tech companies. There was a meeting between the New Zealand Prime Minister and civil society representatives. Then, there was a summit with President Macron, Prime Minister Ardern, Theresa May, Justin Trudeau, the Vice-President of Indonesia, Sénégal... This was not a Western construct. Each element provided an important input to this Christchurch call document. There was a follow-up meeting in September at the United Nations General Assembly that involved President Macron, Prime Minister Ardern and the UN Office for Counter-terrorism. This gave the opportunity to assess what had actually happened with respect to the commitments that had been laid out in the Christchurch calls. The key outcome was probably the decision to get tech companies to reform the global Internet forum on counter-terrorism. It is a forum previously set by tech companies and one of its main missions has become the eradication of hate content online. Making them part of the conversation was essential. The second key outcome was an agreement to fund research about the impact of algorithms in the propagation of hate and extremist content. Algorithms and social media amplify the extremes. The call-to-action enabled to improve the lack of transparency. A communication process (crisis response protocol) has also been created in order to be deployed in case a similar event were to occur again. That was designed to make sure that, when content is uploaded, companies can readily take it down. It is basically a protocol that specifies who to call, the law-enforcing authorities. Tech companies, governments and stakeholders will consequently be better prepared. A lot has been achieved in a short period of time. Yet, there is still a lot more to do. and to build on this initiative. The key to its success was multi-stakeholder diplomacy: traditionally, diplomats talk to governments. In this situation, confining discussions to governments would not have been effective. It was crucial to involve tech companies. The call-to-action was successful because it was very targeted and everybody agreed to find a common way to solve this shared problem in a very constructive manner. The whole international legal system has been in a period of flux and transition with multinational corporations as well as civil society gathering momentum. Taking a consultative approach really paved the way towards building something both practical and meaningful.

As previously mentioned, another area of diplomatic cooperation between New Zealand and France is the fight against climate. This phenomenon has a heavy impact in the Pacific. Prime Minister Ardern gave a lecture on the challenges of climate change from a Pacific perspective at Sciences Po Paris in April 2018. She put much emphasis on the fact that climate change is not hypothetical but real: it is an urgent issue that needs to be addressed right now. Because of global warming, weather events such as cyclones become more intense. It also has significant consequences on the economy because of cultures being affected by temperatures rising and the depletion of the maritime ecosystem. Pacific is at the frontline of climate change. While attending the 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP 25, New Zealand is co-hosting with Fiji a Pavilion to encourage dialogue and raise awareness on ocean and climate change issues that are relevant to the

Pacific region. New Zealand invites other countries to resort to renewable energies, with sources such as hydrogen or solar energy being potent points of supply. New Zealand is inviting all countries to take the right actions and make the fight against climate change an utmost priority. Pacific Island Countries played a critical role in the final stages of the negotiation for the Paris agreement back in 2015, to conclude the negotiations and increase ambition.

Keeping in mind that temperatures might gain two Celsius degrees or more by the end of the century, climate change will create major hazards, including storms. New Zealand is providing official development assistance to Pacific island countries, to mitigate emissions and adapt to climate change. The goal is to be able to live despite temperature warming, and to prevent a climate refugee crisis in the near future.

## The Indo-Pacific notion

New Zealand has a lot in common with France. The government released last year a Pacific Reset Strategy<sup>2</sup> which recognises a lot of the changes in the Pacific region , with climate change being one of them as well as the increasing geostrategic competition. The French Indo Pacific strategy also identifies the same issues. The two nations have a very shared view on the challenges in the region. They are already working a lot together to seek to address those, so they maintain quite strong defence cooperation in the Indo Pacific region. Government authorities from France, Australia and New Zealand built together a humanitarian assistance disaster relief. New Zealand and France also do a lot as far as maritime surveillance space is concerned: they combat illegal fishing. They also have very similar views on the preservation of an international rules-based order and the protection of South-Pacific borders. The Indo Pacific is an area where these diplomatic partners are very like-minded. New Zealand intends to nurture a closer integration of the French Pacific territories located in the region. The Indo Pacific notion is indeed a substantial part of the bilateral relationship.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/new-zealands-pacific-reset-building-relations-amid-increased-regional-competition/>



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