Proposed Overseas Travel: Hon Carmel Sepuloni

1. I seek Cabinet approval to travel to Nadi and Suva, Fiji, departing New Zealand on Wednesday 27 February and returning on Saturday 2 March 2019 to attend the 6th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability, and undertake bilateral meetings with Fiji Ministers that have Ministerial responsibility for Disability Issues, Social Development, and Arts, Culture & Heritage.

2. The Prime Minister has approved the travel in-principle.

Purpose of Travel

3. For persons with disabilities, the Pacific context presents unique challenges. Vulnerability is often reinforced by societal and cultural norms, economic disparity, and susceptibility to natural disasters. There are more than 1.7 million people with disabilities in the Pacific, and women and girls with disabilities are up to 3 times more likely to experience sexual abuse and violence than females without disabilities. In the last five years, Pacific Island countries have strengthened their commitments to tackle barriers faced by persons with disabilities, including through the adoption of the 2016-2025 Pacific Regional Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but significant challenges remain.

4. The Pacific Disability Forum is the preeminent regional organisation in the Pacific on disability issues. This conference is a platform for stakeholders to engage in dialogue about disability issues pertinent to the region. The outcomes of the conferences assist in shaping the Pacific Disability Forum’s national, regional and international work.

5. The rights of persons with disabilities are a priority for New Zealand’s international human rights engagement. New Zealand has a well-established leadership role internationally in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, dating back to our chairing role in negotiating the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This profile continues today through New Zealand-led initiatives relating to the rights of persons with disabilities in the UN and our efforts to mainstream these rights across the human rights agenda.
6 In the Pacific Reset, New Zealand is committed to developing deeper partnerships with Pacific Island countries. Our place is in the Pacific. New Zealand has a unique Pacific identity, with a significant Pacific population, and strong links formed by history, culture, politics, demographics and family. This has profound implications for New Zealand’s domestic and foreign policy in the Pacific.

7 Under the Pacific Reset, New Zealand has committed to increasing engagement on values issues, including human rights and inclusive development. Attendance at this conference provides New Zealand the opportunity to meaningfully engage on issues important to the Pacific and enact our commitment to deepening engagement and relationships in the region. This is a significant part of our engagement in the region.

8 Additionally, on Friday 1 March, I intend to have bilateral meetings in Suva with Fiji counterpart Ministers to discuss bilateral matters, such as Minister Vuniwaqa (Women, Children, Poverty Alleviation), Minister Kumar (Housing and Community Development) and Minister Akbar (Arts and Heritage). Officials will work to confirm these meetings once travel is approved.

9 These opportunities will also strengthen New Zealand’s ability to reflect on domestic disability issues facing Pacific diaspora living in New Zealand.

Ministerial Party

10 I propose to leave New Zealand on Wednesday 27 February 2019 and return on Saturday 2 March 2019.
**Acting Ministers**

15 I propose that Hon Peeni Henare act as Minister for Social Development and Minister for Disability Issues during my travel.

**Recommendations**

1 I recommend that Cabinet:

1.1 authorise my absence from New Zealand from Wednesday 27 February 2019 to Saturday 2 March 2019 to travel to Nadi, Fiji, to attend the 6th Pacific Regional Conference on Disability, and Suva, Fiji, to undertake bilateral meetings with counterpart Fiji Ministers;

1.2 agree that I be accompanied by one member of staff;

1.3 approve the estimated expenditure of [redacted] for the travel expenses of the Ministerial party, as a charge to Vote: Internal Affairs [Members of the Executive – Travel];

1.4 note that accommodation on Friday 1 March 2019 in Suva for myself and my member of staff will be covered personally;

1.5 agree that in my absence Hon Peeni Henare will act as Minister for Social Development and Minister for Disability Issues;

1.6 note that the House is not sitting during my absence.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Carmel Sepuloni

Minister for Disability Issues
Minister for Social Development
Associate Minister for Pacific Peoples
Associate Minister for Arts, Culture and Heritage