



**Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister**  
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160  
New Zealand

By email: [j.ardern@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:j.ardern@ministers.govt.nz)

28 July 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

We are the Team of Six Million, a group established to oppose the imposition of quarantine fees.

New Zealanders all over the world watched with immense pride as Aotearoa's team of five million came together, under your leadership, to eliminate Covid-19 and avoid a devastating public health crisis.

However, there are more than one million New Zealanders who have faced this pandemic while living overseas. We are not a team of five million. We are a team of six million. Aotearoa is our home, too, and we are deeply saddened and disappointed to learn that our government may charge us a fee to return to it.

All New Zealanders have made sacrifices this year. We have also been subjected to lengthy lockdowns and previously unthinkable restrictions on our fundamental civil rights, and we are also suffering from the economic and health impacts of this pandemic. But we are not responsible for this pandemic, and we should not be penalised for the sole reason that we were living outside of Aotearoa when it hit.

No New Zealander should have to pay to enter their home country. Nor should New Zealanders need to justify their need to return home, whether on a permanent or temporary basis. Similarly, New Zealanders who chose to make Aotearoa their home but whose families may be elsewhere should not have to justify their need to travel overseas and return again. Such a policy will hurt our migrant communities the hardest.

This is about home, and it is about whānau, and our ability to reconnect with the two during an international health and economic crisis. A quarantine fee for returning New Zealanders is a heartless proposal, and we urge you not to introduce one for the reasons that follow.

**1. It shifts the costs of New Zealand's public health response to Covid-19 onto individuals**

Mandatory isolation in a government-run facility is now a key part of New Zealand's public health strategy with respect to Covid-19. New Zealand's health system is generally publicly funded, and measures to combat Covid-19 have, so far, also been publicly funded. A quarantine fee would represent a shift to a 'user-pays' model which is inconsistent with New Zealand's approach to funding public health. All New Zealanders reap the benefits of the

public health strategy against Covid-19. We should collectively, as past, present and future taxpayers, bear the cost.

## **2. It would disproportionately affect low income New Zealanders**

The economic burden of this pandemic has fallen most heavily on those who can least afford it. A quarantine fee will simply exacerbate existing inequalities. The notion that all New Zealanders living overseas are on high salaries is a myth. Numerous New Zealanders have lost their jobs as a direct result of this pandemic and are not eligible for any kind of benefit support while outside of New Zealand. Any suggestion that we can simply ride out the pandemic and return home once this is over (or should have or could have returned earlier) ignores the realities that we face.

While Aotearoa is our home, our dreams, our lives and our livelihoods are overseas for the time being. We should not be punished for this.

## **3. It could well be a breach of fundamental rights and Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

It is a fundamental right of all New Zealand citizens to return to their country. This right is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act. A quarantine fee limits the exercise of this right to those who can afford it. Those who cannot are, at best, trapped abroad in a time of significant global uncertainty or, at worst, are rendered stateless by an expired visa.

Charging Māori a fee to return to their whenua is an egregious breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Should your government choose to introduce legislation to charge a quarantine fee notwithstanding these significant legal implications, the New Zealand public must be properly consulted at the select committee stage.

Anyone who would like to go home to New Zealand during this crisis should be able to do so free of charge.

Please don't leave some of us stuck on the sidelines, far away from our loved ones. We are a team of six million. We are in this together.

Yours faithfully,

*Team of Six Million*

**Team of Six Million - Kiwis United against Quarantine Fees**