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Hon Annette King

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International Firearm Safety Seminar – in the right hands

I am privileged to have been asked to welcome so many distinguished presenters and participants, both from New Zealand and overseas, to this International Firearm Safety Seminar.

Congratulations to the New Zealand Police, New Zealand Mountain Safety Council and the New Zealand Council of Licensed Firearms Owners for organising this event.

The Prime Minister, Helen Clark, has asked me to pass on her regrets that she cannot be here today, but she sends her best wishes for the seminar.

She is well aware, as I am, that New Zealand has a deserved international reputation for the State and civilians working together to promote the safe use and control of firearms, and I am sure that reputation is an important reason this seminar has attracted so much international support, notably in relation to our Pacific neighbours.

As Police Minister, I am naturally proud of the police contribution to this seminar, and I particularly want to thank Inspector Joe Green, manager of the Licensing and Vetting Service Centre, for his drive and enthusiasm in making sure the event has come off in professional manner from a police perspective.

I also support the aims of this seminar ---- to call attention to responsible and safe firearm use; to motivate quality research in firearm safety; to exchange ideas and strategies; to encourage community participation in firearms safety; and to assist Pacific island states with firearm safety and training.

Not many in this room will be aware of this, but this is a specially fitting week in which to be honouring New Zealand's generally fine record in firearms control and safety.

New Zealand is a relatively young country in international terms, but this week we celebrate a number of pending major milestones in our short police history.

On Friday I will have the honour of reviewing the commemoration parade honouring the 120th anniversary of the New Zealand Police, the 70th anniversary of the Police Pipe Band, 65 years of women in the police, 50 years of the Police Dog Section and the 25th anniversary of the Royal New Zealand Police College.

It is what you might describe as a "happening" week, and I believe it is a real tribute to the mana and foresight of our police that this international seminar is also happening this week.

The theme of this seminar is *In the Right Hands*, a fitting title for a New Zealand based conference.

As I said in my foreword to the seminar booklet, while New Zealand has a comparatively high level of firearm ownership, we enjoy a relatively low level of violent crime committed with firearms, and declining level of suicide using firearms.

I strongly believe that the most important reason for our enviable record is the fact that the New Zealand arms control regime licenses individuals as fit and proper to possess firearms. There is also an emphasis on training in firearm safety and secure storage.

That generally means that the people in society with firearms tend to be people we can rely on to treat a privilege as a responsibility. And we must be constantly vigilant to ensure New Zealanders do understand that firearm ownership IS a privilege that has responsibility attached to it.

Congratulations again to the organisers of this event, and welcome to everyone participating, especially our overseas visitors. I wish you all the best over the next three days, and thank you again for asking me to join you today.