

Christchurch mosque shootings: Royal Commission report aims to avoid future terror attacks



By [Kurt Bayer](#)

NZ Herald 9 Dec, 2020 05:00 AM

Spy chiefs, police, and the Prime Minister yesterday apologised after a much-awaited report detailed how the Christchurch mosque terrorist was able to plot, amass an arsenal of weapons, and execute his deadly attack.

New Zealand's security agencies had deployed "an inappropriate concentration of resources" probing Islamic extremism when the Australian-born gunman attacked two mosques on March 15, 2019, a Royal Commission of Inquiry concluded in a much-awaited 792-page report released yesterday.

But despite that focus – along with police accepting that Brenton Harrison Tarrant "did not meet required standards" in their checks and processes in granting him a firearms licence – nothing could have been done to stop the attacks, which left 51 Muslims dead, the independent report says.

Other than the email sent by Tarrant to Parliamentary Service at 1.32pm on March 15, 2019 – just eight minutes before he opened fire at the Al Noor Mosque – there was no other information provided or otherwise available to any relevant public sector agency that "could or should have alerted them to the terrorist attack".



Jacinda Ardern said the inquiry into the Christchurch terrorist attack revealed an "inappropriate concentration of resources" and apologised on behalf of the government.
Photo / Alan Gibson

Muslim leaders, shooting survivors, and grieving families reacted to the report's release with concerns it lacked conclusions on accountability.

However, they hope the inquiry's report, which makes 44 recommendations including an overhaul of the "old-fashioned" police firearms licensing system and calls for a new agency with responsibility for strategic issues around intelligence and security, will result in a safer, more tolerant New Zealand.

Rashid Omar, whose 24-year-old son Tariq was shot dead at Masjid Al Noor, had waited a long time to find out what really happened and why.

But the release of yesterday's report left him – and other families – with unanswered questions.

Omar wants a copy of the royal commission's interview with the terrorist released, along with more details about his gun licence referees. He also wants non-sensitive details about why intelligence officers focused on the threat of Islamic fundamentalists.



The report has looked at how the attacks happened - and how they could be avoided in the future. Photo / Mark Mitchell

"While the courts have dealt appropriately with the terrorist, the affected families, survivors and witnesses have not had their questions answered, particularly around the question of accountability," he said.

Abdigani Ali, spokesman for the Al Noor and Linwood mosques, said his community found it "alarming" that the risk posed by right-wing extremism was "so poorly understood and resourced" by intelligence services and that prior to May 2018 resources were allocated almost exclusively to the threat of Islamist extremist terrorism.

"This report must lead to change - we have 800 pages of words, we now need them translated to powerful action," he said.

"It's time for change and the time is ripe to make those changes. We have one of the most diverse parliaments in the world and all sorts of groups are waking up to outdated ideology that has disadvantaged different parts of New Zealand's community for a very long time."

The inquiry, launched just 10 days after the attacks and chaired by Commissioner Sir William Young, looked into Tarrant's activities before the atrocities, including his travel in New Zealand and around the world, how he obtained firearms, his use of social media, and what relevant state sector agencies knew about him.



Mourners at the national remembrance service in Hagley Park, Christchurch last year. Photo / Dean Purcell

Many of the 44 recommendations focus on how to prevent, detect and respond to current and emerging threats of violent extremism – and how the new national intelligence and security agency would operate and work with communities, civil society, government, and the private sector.

A gaming friend of Tarrant, proposed by the plotting killer as a referee on his firearms licence application, was "well aware" of his extremist political opinions and that he was racist and Islamophobic – but did not tell the vetting officer.

"Insufficient attention" was given to Tarrant's referees, the report said, and concluded that the police administration of the firearms licensing system "did not meet required standards".

Faisal Sayad, of Linwood Islamic Centre who also survived the shooting, said bias shown by government agencies led to a lack of trust between their community and several government agencies – including the police.

"We now need to ensure that the changes this inquiry recommends will be effective in rebuilding that trust," he said.

SIS Director-General Rebecca Kitteridge said while no failures were found within government agencies, "many" lessons could be learned and "significant areas" needed change.

She also apologised to the Muslim community after hearing how they felt "targeted by the security agencies" or felt "under suspicion" when they were not.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said although nothing could have stopped the attack - which the report said was carried out by a "lone actor" - there were still failings at a high level.

"And for that I apologise," she said.

The Government has agreed in principle to implement all 44 recommendations in the report and Ardern hopes they can act quickly.

"We will work with community and interest groups across New Zealand as we implement the royal commission," she said.

"We all have a role to play in ensuring an event like March 15 never happens again."