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**“Christchurch shooting survivor” Temel Atacocugu lets the cat out of the bag.**

# **Saudi Arabia's King Salman invites 200 survivors and victims' relatives of the Christchurch shootings as 2.5MILLION Muslims throng to Mecca for the Hajj pilgrimage**

- King Salman will pay for flights and accommodation for the pilgrims from NZ
  - He was deeply affected by the Christchurch shootings which killed 52 in March
  - The monarch invites guests each year to take part in the ceremonies at Mecca
  - More than 2.5million Muslims will gather for the pilgrimage on Friday
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By [ROSS IBBETSON FOR MAILONLINE](#)

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[Saudi Arabia](#)'s King Salman has invited some 200 survivors and relatives of the victims of the Christchurch Mosque shootings to be his guests at the Hajj pilgrimage this week.

The monarch is providing airfares and accommodation to the pilgrims from [New Zealand](#) who will join at least 2.5million others for the annual Hajj journey to Mecca. The Saudi ambassador to New Zealand, Abdulrahman Al Suhaibani, says King Salman was shocked by the March 15 attacks at two mosques in which an Australian white supremacist has been charged with killing 51 people.

The atrocity has been cited as inspiration by other white supremacists, most recently in an attack at a [Walmart](#) store in El Paso, [Texas](#), that left at least 22 people dead.



- **Saudi Arabia's King Salman is providing airfares and accommodation to the pilgrims from New Zealand who will join at least 2.5million others for the annual hajj journey to Mecca**

Each year, the king invites several hundred people to perform the hajj as his own guests, often selecting those most touched by tragedy that year.

Al Suhaibani said this is the first time the king has invited anyone from New Zealand on his annual program to help get people to the hajj who otherwise may struggle to make it.

Two weeks ago, the ambassador travelled to Christchurch to hand out the simple white garments the male pilgrims will wear. The terry cloth garments worn by men are meant to strip pilgrims down of adornment and symbolise equality of mankind before God.

'It's a wonderful time and this is a golden chance for people to get spiritual elevation,' says Gamal Fouda, the imam at the Al Noor mosque, one of the two mosques that were attacked.

Fouda, who also survived the shootings, is travelling with the group as a spiritual leader. He says that while all Muslims want to do the hajj, many tend to delay their trips due to the expense, especially from distant New Zealand.



• Families of victims of the March 2019 attack on mosques in New Zealand, arrive at Jeddah airport on August 2

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• Saudi Arabia's king has directed hosting 200 pilgrims of the families of the victims and injured of the terrorist attack on two mosques at Christchurch in New Zealand

Fouda says the memories of the shooting remain fresh in everybody's minds and his mosque hasn't yet returned to normal.

'The most important thing is that the New Zealand community, including Muslims, they stood together against hate,' Fouda says. 'And we are still saying that hate is not going to divide us. We will continue to love each other.'

Atacocugu says he was feeling good on March 15 when he entered the Al Noor mosque for Friday prayers after finishing a final session with an acupuncturist, who was treating him for a sports injury.

**Christchurch Truth editor: Ever since March 15, another researcher and I have been looking at Temel Atacocugu's bandaged left arm – the arm that was supposedly hit by a bullet (or bullets) fired by the alleged gunman. The nature of the bandaging puzzled us, as it was clearly inappropriate for a gunshot wound. My associate, who knows more about these things than I do, said it was bandaging designed to provide compression, and thus might be suitable for something like a sprain. So in making the above statement, Atacocugu appears to have inadvertently let the cat out of the bag. We always knew he**



**was a liar – as all the crisis actors are – but now we have a little more evidence to support our contention.**

When he saw the gunman walk into the mosque, he thought at first he was a police officer because of his paramilitary clothing. Then the man started shooting and Atacocugu found himself looking right at him as he fired a bullet into Atacocugu's mouth, shattering his jaw.

**Christchurch Truth editor: This is an outrageous lie. He was not hit in the mouth by any bullet, and his jaw was not shattered. See the photographs at <http://kufr.club>. Furthermore, his left arm (see below) would have provided no protection to his vital organs. Real bullets would have gone right through his arm AND his body.**

'And then I said, "Oh my God, I am dying." When I see he's shooting, when I see the smoke, I said, "Yeah, I'm dying." That's the first thought,' Atacocugu says.



- The Saudi ambassador to New Zealand, Abdulrahman Al Suhaibani, says King Salman was shocked by the March 15 attacks at two mosques



• **James Munro, Ambassador of New Zealand to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, speaks with the families of victims of the March 2019 attack on mosques in New Zealand**

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After falling to the floor, his left arm ended up protecting his vital organs as the gunman continued firing bullets into him.

Recovering at the Christchurch Hospital after the shooting, Atacocugu couldn't eat for a week and couldn't walk for three weeks.

But after several surgeries, he's now able to walk unassisted and get some use from his left hand. He has more surgeries ahead and is being helped in Saudi Arabia by his 21-year-old nephew, who is travelling with him.

Another of those travelling to the hajj is 33-year-old Aya Al-Umari, whose brother Hussein, 35, was among those killed at the Al Noor mosque.

'We had a very typical sibling relationship,' she says. 'So you have your nagging elder brother, nagging little sister. But at the end of the day you love each other, even though you don't verbally say it. But you just telepathically know that.'

She says witnesses and video taken by the gunman indicate her brother stood up to the attacker, allowing others to escape.





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- **Including the pilgrims from New Zealand, more than 1.8 million visitors had arrived by midday local time on Tuesday, authorities said**

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'So he fought to the very last minute,' she says. 'And this is Hussein, in his nature. He's always the type of person who would want to see if there is danger, he'd face it, he wouldn't escape from it.'

When visiting Mecca, Al-Umari says, she'll pray for her parents and herself to have the patience to cope with the loss of Hussein.

She also plans to pray for the other families from her mosque who lost loved ones. And she says she feels her brother will be with her in Saudi Arabia.

Crowds of worshippers have already begun to gather in Mecca in the days ahead of the hajj, the focal point of the Islamic calendar.

'It's the first time I've felt something so strongly - it's striking,' said 40-year-old Indonesian pilgrim Sobar in rudimentary Arabic.

More than 1.8 million visitors had arrived by midday local time on Tuesday, authorities said.

Crowds of faithful from across the world wore flowing white robes as they descended on the holy city located in the west of the ultra-conservative kingdom.

The pilgrims will undertake religious rites that have remained unchanged since the founding of Islam 14 centuries ago.





- Last year almost 2.5 million Muslims made the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Named 'Hajj' the journey is made annually and it is mandatory for every Muslim to travel to the holy site at least once during their life if they are 'physically and financially capable'



- Pilgrims will at some point visit the Great Mosque of Mecca (Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām). At the centre of the mosque is the Kaaba (pictured), known by Muslims as the 'house of God'. The structure determines the direction of prayer for all Muslims around the world, who must face in the direction of Mecca

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and Muslims must perform it at least once in their lives if they can afford to.

'There are all nations of the world, all languages. There are no differences between us,' said Nurul Jamal, a 61-year-old pilgrim from India.

Mecca, closed to non-Muslims, is home to the Kaaba - a cube structure draped in black cloth embroidered in gold located at the heart of the mosque.

The Great Mosque of Mecca with its Ottoman minarets sits amid skyscrapers that host upmarket malls and luxury hotels.

Muslims face toward the Kaaba when praying the prescribed five-times daily.

Pilgrims circle the Kaaba seven times and perform a number of sacred rites.

While waiting for the beginning of the hajj, worshippers roam the esplanade or pray in the mosque in stifling heat.





- **Some 600,000 Saudi Arabians are expected to make the shorter journey to Mecca close to the Red Sea coast, while some 1.7million international pilgrims will arrive and depart via 14,000 flights into the city**

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- Despite the huge number of pilgrims attending every year, the Hajj can be an extremely expensive journey to make. Low-cost pilgrimages from inside the Middle East can start at around \$800, but some travel groups operating from the US offer 5-star packages for a 12-day trip at \$11,900

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- **New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, sympathised with those who lost loved ones in the Christchurch massacre (pictured)**

Temperatures can surpass 104 Fahrenheit and some pilgrims carry sun shades.

Large misting machines installed at the holy sites help to make the heat more bearable.

Men wear two pieces of unstitched cloth called 'ihram' that leaves one shoulder exposed.

Pilgrims move together in large groups, led by guides holding their national flags.

Guards in khaki fastidiously lead worshippers to their five daily prayers.

In 2015, some 2,300 worshippers were killed in the worst stampede in the history of the hajj.

Since then Saudi Arabia has sought to reassure pilgrims, deploying tens of thousands of security officers and installing cameras to oversee every corner of the holy sites.

Even though the hajj lasts only five days, many pilgrims arrive weeks before and linger in the city.

The total number of arrivals is limited however as each Muslim country receives a pilgrim quota.

Some worshippers have spent years on waiting lists - sometimes as long as a decade - just to perform their religious duty.

Outside of the hajj, Muslims can also undertake a lesser, year-round pilgrimage known as umrah.