Mr Speaker, Al salam Alaikum. Peace be upon you. And peace be upon all of us.

Mr Speaker, March 15 will now be forever a day etched in our collective memories. On a quiet Friday afternoon, a man stormed into a place of peaceful worship and took away the lives of 50 people. That quiet Friday afternoon has become our darkest of days. But for the families, it was more than that. It was the day that the simple act of prayer — of practicing their Muslim faith and religion — led to the loss of their loved ones' lives. Those loved ones were brothers, daughters, fathers and children. They were New Zealanders. They are us. And because they are us, we, as a nation, we mourn them. We feel a huge duty of care to them. And Mr Speaker, we have so much we feel the need to say and to do.

One of the roles I never anticipated having, and hoped never to have, is to voice the grief of a nation. At this time, it has been second only to securing the care of those affected, and the safety of everyone. And in this role, I wanted to speak directly to the families. We cannot know your grief, but we can walk with you at every stage. We can. And we will surround you with aroha, manaakitanga and all that makes us, us. Our hearts are heavy, but our spirit is strong.

Mr Speaker, six minutes after a 111 call was placed alerting the police to the shootings at Al-Noor mosque, police were on the scene. The arrest itself was nothing short of an act of bravery. Two country police officers rammed the vehicle from which the offender was still shooting. They pulled open his car door — when there were explosives inside — and pulled him out. I know we all wish to acknowledge that their acts put the safety of New Zealanders above their own, and we thank them. But they were not the only ones who showed extraordinary courage. Naeem Rashid, originally from Pakistan, died after rushing at the terrorist and trying to wrestle the gun from him. He lost his life trying to save those who were worshipping alongside him. Abdul Aziz, originally from Afghanistan, confronted and faced down the armed terrorist after grabbing the nearest thing to hand — a simple eftpos machine. He risked his life and no doubt saved many with his selfless bravery. There will be countless stories, some of which we may never know, but to each, we acknowledge you in this place, in this House.

For many of us, the first sign of the scale of this terrorist attack was the images of ambulance staff transporting victims to Christchurch hospital. To the first responders, the ambulance staff and the health professionals who have assisted, and who continue to assist those who have been injured, please accept the heartfelt thanks of us all. I saw first-hand your care and your professionalism in the face of extraordinary challenges. We are proud of your work, and incredibly grateful for it.

Mr Speaker, there is one person at the centre of this act of terror against our Muslim community in New Zealand. A 28-year-old man — an Australian citizen — has been charged with one count of murder. Other charges will follow. He will face the full force of the law in New Zealand. The families of the fallen will have justice. He sought many things from his act of terror, but one was notoriety. And that is why you will never hear me mention his name. He is a terrorist. He is a criminal. He is an extremist. But he will, when I speak, be nameless. And to others, I implore you: speak the names of those who were lost, rather than the name of the man who took them. He may have sought notoriety, but we in New Zealand will give him nothing. Not even his name.

Mr Speaker, we will also look at the role social media played and what steps we can take, including on the international stage, and in unison with our partners. There is no question that ideas and language of division and hate have existed for decades, but their form of distribution, the tools of organisation, they are new. We cannot simply sit back and accept that these platforms just exist and that what is said on them is not the responsibility of the place where they are published. They are the publisher, not just the postman. There cannot be a case of all profit, no responsibility. This of course doesn't take away the responsibility we too must show as a nation, to confront racism, violence and extremism. I don't have all of the answers now, but we must collectively find them. And we must act.

As I conclude, I acknowledge there are many stories that will have struck all of us since March 15. One I wish to mention, is that of Hati Mohemmed Daoud Nabi. He was the 71-year-old man who opened the door at the Al-Noor mosque and uttered the words "Hello brother, welcome". His final words. Of course, he had no idea of the hate that sat behind the door, but his welcome tells us so much — that he was a member of a faith that welcomed all its members, that showed openness, and care. I have said many times Mr Speaker, we are a nation of 200 ethnicities, 160 languages. We open our doors to others and say welcome. And the only thing that must change after the events of Friday is that this same door must close on all of those who espouse hate and fear. Yes, the person who committed these acts was not from here. He was not raised here. He did not find his ideology here, but that is not to say that those very same views do not live here.

I know that as a nation, we wish to provide every comfort we can to our Muslim community in this darkest of times. And we are. The mountain of flowers around the country that lie at the doors of mosques, the spontaneous song outside the gates. These are ways of expressing an outpouring of love and empathy. But we wish to do more. We wish for every member of our communities to also feel safe. Safety means being free from the fear of violence. But it also means being free from the fear of those sentiments of racism and hate, that create a place where violence can flourish. And every single one of us has the power to change that. Mr Speaker, on Friday it will be a week since the attack. Members of the Muslim community will gather for worship on that day. Let us acknowledge their grief as they do. Let's support them as they gather again for worship.

We are one, they are us. Tatau tatau, Al salam Alaikum, Weh Rahmat Allah, Weh Barakaatuh.