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MEDIA RELEASE

TITLE: Today I met the old students who still owe money to IRD...

Today I met the old students who still owe money to IRD (Inland Revenue Department) for their student loans. Some students didn't bother to turn up and I thought we'll leave them out.

In 2014, we considered supporting our current crop of returning students by providing for the \$10,000 resettlement grants and assistance with repaying their loans. The student's only criteria is that they must have their degree or diplomas or selected technical certificates to qualify.

If you went to study but did not complete your qualifications, you would not be eligible. Initially we agreed to pay lump sums. But one student received this and left so now payments are made fortnightly.

The students before 2014 were not eligible for this assistance. So we had to figure out how to help them.

We knew they owed money as loans to the IRD. We also knew that some had made payments but most had not. That IRD had also changed their policies and that they could stop you at the border for non-payment. Even worse was that non-payment just increased interest rates so they became larger than the original principal loan.

We were aware that the total numbers were about 36. So how to help. Some of these people were senior public servants they held positions of responsibility befitting their training.

We needed to help.

The IRD were approached and support sought. The only thing they agreed was as long as were making some payments, they would not be stopped at the border.

In the final wash though, we agreed to contribute \$1000 per year. But the people in the list were also required to contribute. Some have, some not. After today's meeting I will advise cabinet and then decide what to do with those.

It also emerged today that people have ignored these loans and they continue to bury their heads in the sand as it were.

I understand that the IRD gave offered some relief and we will be holding workshops to show people what they can do.

In this respect, the next meeting will require they bring their last notice from the IRD so we can help them.

So to summarise government support for our scholars.

All returning students who qualify were eligible for the 'Relocation Grant':

- Degree + Post Grad \$10,000
- Diploma Under Grad \$5,000
- Certificate \$2,000

Assistance with repaying student loans prior to 2014:

- \$1,000 assistance for loan repayment
- Students must make contribution as well
- They decide if government contribution to go towards principal or interest

[ENDS]

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