



The Right Honourable Dame Helen Winkelmann

CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW ZEALAND | TE TUMU WHAKAWĀ O AOTEAROA

18 February 2022

MEDIA STATEMENT

MEDIA RELEASE

Protest actions impact on High Court and Court of Appeal operations in Wellington

The Chief Justice has expressed her concern about the disruption to the courts caused by the protest in Wellington. This has already resulted in the adjournment of a one-week sexual violation trial which was to commence in the Wellington High Court on Monday 21 February.

The Chief Justice said the immediate effect of the ongoing protest activity is that criminal proceedings cannot go ahead if they require the attendance of defendants who are in custody. Protestors' vehicles have blocked the required secure access to the court.

Protestors' vehicles have blocked streets around Parliament, preventing vehicle access to Wellington High Court and the Court of Appeal. Protestors have also erected tents in court precincts.

Chief Justice Winkelmann says the current situation is extremely difficult.

“Functioning courts are critical to the maintenance of law and order and the safeguarding of human rights. The courts must be able to continue to do their work. This serves the whole community – including victims of crime and defendants in custody awaiting their day in court.”

The Chief Justice said she was also concerned that the presence of protestors in the court precincts may intimidate court users.

“Throughout the pandemic, the judiciary has made every effort to ensure that people are safe, and feel safe, when they come to court.”

The decision to adjourn the trial in the High Court next week was not taken lightly, and not until all other avenues had been investigated, the Chief Justice said.

“The courts are acutely aware of the toll that delaying a trial takes on everyone involved – the complainant, witnesses, the defendant, and whānau.”

The Court of Appeal continues to hear appeals by remote means. Its building has been closed since Monday, with judges and staff working offsite because of the road closures and noise associated with the protest action.

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