

New Zealand Prime Minister Visits Earthquake Project in Istanbul

Prime Minister Helen Clark paid a brief visit to New Zealand earthquake engineers working with their Turkish counterparts to reduce earthquake risk in Istanbul.

The project will examine 369 buildings in the Municipality of Bakirkoy in Istanbul. Their strength will be assessed based on measurements and tests on each building. Measures to reduce risk will then be devised and costed. An important component of the project is the interaction with building owners to gauge their attitudes to strengthening and their ability to pay for it.



Mayor of Bakirkoy watches as New Zealand Project Director Richard Sharpe and Prime Minister Helen Clark examine the book he gave her.

Information from the project will help not only the owners but the Bakirkoy Municipality, the Istanbul Municipality and the Turkish Government to develop implementation plans for strengthening or replacement of buildings. The project began in January this year and will finish in September. The work is being carried out by Beca Prota Joint Venture, a collaboration between Beca International Consultants of NZ and Prota Engineering of Turkey. Other NZ firms involved as part of Earthquake Engineering NZ are Institute of Geological Sciences, Holmes Consulting Group and David Hopkins Consulting.

Project Director Dr Richard Sharpe greeted the Prime Minister on arrival at the project office in Kartaltepe Park. She was introduced to local dignitaries by resident Project Manager, Dr David Hopkins, who showed Helen Clark some of the work being done, including the drilling of a concrete sample from a nearby building. Mayor of Bakirkoy, Atac Unal Erzen presented the Prime Minister with flowers and a book in welcoming her to the site. Director of the Prime Ministry Project Implementation Unit, Murat Sungur Bursa, who is responsible for the World Bank funded project, also presented a book on Turkey.

A feature of the visit was a welcome by 69 students from a local school who sang both verses of the NZ national anthem, the Turkish national anthem and a stirring Turkish song to the tune of Beethoven's ninth symphony.

The visit concluded with the Prime Minister sampling pavlova topped with kiwi fruit made by a local restaurant chef, at the request of NZ staff on the project.

Local television, radio and newspaper reporters followed the visit which featured in local media.



PIU Director, Murat Sungur Bursa and Technical Leader, Ali Ihsan Karahan with Prime Minister Helen Clark.

There can be no doubt that the visit of the Prime Minister did much to promote awareness of what NZ earthquake engineers can do to assist in reduction of earthquake risk worldwide. As David Hopkins, who is Chairman of Earthquake Engineering, said, "We could not ask for a better profile than that resulting from a visit from our Prime Minister. We appreciate very much that she took the time to visit us."

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