

**In February 2020, Christchurch Mayor Lianne Dalziel offered a formal apology to families bereaved by the earthquake in Christchurch on 22 February 2011, and those who were injured.**

When I was first elected Mayor of Christchurch, I felt a burden that came with that office beyond the usual pressures a new Mayor might experience.

Mine was the knowledge that people had died or were seriously injured when buildings in our city collapsed on the 22 February 2011 in circumstances that left a lot of unanswered questions for so many families.

I first met with members of the Quake Families Trust prior to the commemoration of the 2014 anniversary. The message I heard was that lessons needed to be learned, so no other families had to experience what their loved one or they themselves had suffered.

I committed to do what I could in my role to ensure that this happened.

I was also briefed to expect to be approached at the commemoration service by family members who were seeking an official apology from the Christchurch City Council.

I felt that it was something that I should do – it was an obligation I should fulfil as Mayor. At the same time, I was mindful of the difference between New Zealand's legal system and other countries' legal systems, and the need to ensure that those differences are understood in the context of what is a sincere and heartfelt apology, offered personally and on behalf of the Christchurch City Council.

I am also aware that not all of the families will welcome an apology. Nothing I can say or do will change what happened on that day. Nothing will restore to them what has been lost.

I took guidance from a letter to me from the families in Japan which said: "The only way for us to find meaning in the devastating loss of our beloved [family members] is the knowledge that in the future, someone else will be spared the grief and pain of losing a loved one under similar circumstances."

I have sought to respond to this plea in the way we have formulated the apology, and I will speak of the improvements that have been made to limit the risk of similar situations occurring in the future. These improvements are intended to spare others of the grief and pain of losing a loved one, not just in Christchurch, but in New Zealand.

On behalf of the Council, I want to acknowledge first each of the 185 precious lives that were lost in our city on 22 February 2011 as a result of the events of that day. I offer my heartfelt condolences to all of you who tragically lost loved ones in building collapses, when unreinforced masonry fell, or from rockfall in the Port Hills.

I also want to acknowledge those who were injured or traumatised and extend my sincere sympathies to you as well.

115 of the 185 people who died that day were in the CTV building. A further 18 people died in the PGC building. The places where these buildings stood have become permanent reserves, so their memory lives on, in the gentle atmosphere of the parks with trees and flowers recalling each of them every day forevermore.

There were others who died or were seriously injured that day in circumstances where their safety could have been better assured. This includes people who were crushed when masonry fell on them or the vehicle they were in. We have learned a tragic lesson in Christchurch about the dangers from unreinforced masonry buildings, including understanding the features that are the first to fall and how they may fall.

We learned the importance of identifying and addressing earthquake prone buildings before tragedy strikes.

People's lives were saved in February 2011 when building owners took steps after the September 4, 2010 earthquake to secure these buildings or when sufficient cordons were put in place. People died when steps weren't taken to protect the public from these risks, or the steps taken proved to be inadequate.

So, this part of the city's formal apology is to those family members whose loved ones died when one of these buildings collapsed, and - to all of those who were injured or traumatised by such a collapse. I apologise as Mayor on behalf of the Christchurch City Council.

The law has been changed as a result of what happened. Unreinforced masonry buildings will be treated as a priority when parts of them could fall in an earthquake onto a busy thoroughfare.

Earthquake prone buildings that pose a higher risk to life safety also have to be assessed and remediated in half the time allowed for other earthquake prone buildings in that area of seismic risk.

The law has also been changed to extend the powers of a Council, so it can continue to take action in relation to buildings after a state of emergency has been lifted.

And now back to the CTV Building. As the Mayor of Christchurch, and on behalf of the Christchurch City Council, I wish to formally apologise to the families of the victims of the CTV building collapse for their loss. This was an absolute tragedy and I again offer my deepest and sincerest condolences.

We offer our apologies with utmost respect to, and sympathy for, the families and friends of all the people who died in the CTV building – they were New Zealanders, as well as those who called Japan, China, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand, home. Each one who died was a precious person loved by those who knew them – each of them died with hopes and dreams unrealised.

I apologise as well to everyone who was injured or traumatised in the CTV building collapse, along with their families and friends. The impact this has had on you has affected your lives in ways that are unique to each of you.

As well as apologising to you all, I want to reassure you that changes have been made in New Zealand as a result of this tragedy.

Long before I became Mayor, I began studying what may have contributed to the CTV building's collapse and all of the points of intervention that could have remedied the defects or prevented it being occupied on that tragic day.

The CTV building was given a permit under the local authority bylaws that existed at the time. The Canterbury Earthquakes Royal Commission, established to report on the causes of building failures in the earthquake, discussed in their final summary, a number of factors that contributed to the issue of the building permit for the construction of the CTV building. However, the Royal Commission did not reach any clear conclusion on why the permit was issued without further amendment of the designs; We can therefore apologise for the fact that the building was able to be constructed as it was.

There are more checks and balances now than there were back then. Today's technology allows us to see how any errors have been corrected in the building process. Comprehensive engineers' records, including photographs, now form part of the electronic file that enables the Council to review all such matters. The system is much more robust. And the relevant professional bodies have introduced reporting obligations to ensure that any observed defects during the building process or any time after it is completed are reported to the Council.

In terms of what occurred post-September 2010, when the first earthquake occurred and December when the 'Boxing Day' aftershock occurred, with the notices placed on buildings, the rapid inspection model that existed then and now was never designed to be in the form of a detailed engineering evaluation. It was and remains no more than a rapid visual inspection, and, despite the message on the notice "Inspected No Restriction on Use or Occupancy", building owners still needed to engage their own engineers to carry out detailed investigations.

The notice encouraged building owners to obtain a detailed structural engineering assessment as soon as possible, and, in the case of the CTV building, an inspection was subsequently carried out by a Chartered Professional Engineer.

When we experience loss in circumstances that might have been preventable, there may be comfort gained from the knowledge that the lessons we learn from what went wrong, will mean others won't go through what we have been through.

So, with our heartfelt apology comes an absolute commitment to ensuring that we learn the lessons of that day. In honouring all those who died, were injured or traumatised, or who experienced significant loss we will continue to put in place and advocate for any more checks and balances that would help to prevent that occurring again.

There is no question, that the knowledge that has been gained from our experience has in fact been significant and beneficial worldwide.

Finally, may I today also acknowledge the wider human impact the tragedy had and acknowledge the first responders, the USAR teams and all those who stepped up in the worst possible circumstances on that fateful day. Our heartfelt thanks go to you all. Christchurch will remain forever in your debt.

Thank you for being here. I would like to invite you now to join with me to share a cup of tea, and we can talk.