


This Could Be The Most Progressive Country On Earth

adapted from an article by Angela Cuming

- 1 WELLINGTON, New Zealand — When 6-year-old Eddie Writes decided the world needed a little more kindness, he did the only thing he thought would work — he wrote to his city’s mayor and asked for help putting on an annual ‘Kindness Day’. Much to Eddie’s surprise, Wellington Mayor Justin Lester wrote back. On Nov. 16, New Zealand’s capital city will be holding its first Manaaki Day (manaaki being the Maori¹⁾ word for kindness), taking Eddie’s ideas of how to encourage and celebrate charitable acts to improve the social well-being of citizens. For example, “We can buy toys for children that don’t have any,” Eddie wrote.
- 2 The mayor’s support for the new holiday is part of a new wave of progressive, child-centred politics sweeping New Zealand, led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, herself a new parent. Ardern was met with thunderous applause at the United Nations last month for her speech calling for kindness and cooperation from world leaders. Watched by her partner and their then 4-month-old daughter, Ardern pledged New Zealand would be “a kind and equitable nation where children thrive, and success is measured not only by the nation’s GDP²⁾ but by better lives lived by its people.”
- 3 New Zealand’s social policies are remarkable, but its environmental policies also set it apart. Among the latest environmental policies are a ban on new offshore oil and gas exploration, and plans to generate 100 percent of energy from renewables as part of an aim to be carbon-neutral by 2050.
- 4 “I think instinctively we all feel that money is not the most important thing in life,” says New Zealand public policy researcher Jess Berentson-Shaw. While having enough money does matter, she says, the problem is that excess wealth begins to erode the well-being of a country’s citizens.

- 5 New Zealand's next push will be for the compulsory teaching of the Maori language in schools led by the NZ Greens Party, which is part of Ardern's coalition government. "There's nothing more indicative of a progressive society than one that truly treasures its indigenous language," says NZ Greens co-leader Marama Davidson. "I hope what we can do is show leadership for how other countries can do things," Davidson says.

- 6 In late September, the Greenpeace ship Rainbow Warrior III docked in the city of Dunedin on its *Making Oil History tour of New Zealand*. The international crew spoke of Ardern and her pledge to end offshore oil exploration with almost reverential tones. "The best thing about New Zealand is its politics right now," says Greenpeace NZ executive director Russel Norman. "Jacinda Ardern has given hope to the world that if people make enough noise then the politicians will actually listen. What she's done will change the course of New Zealand's history – and hopefully the world's – forever."

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noot 1 the Maori = de Maori zijn de oorspronkelijke bewoners van Nieuw-Zeeland

noot 2 GDP = Gross Domestic Product: totale geldwaarde van alle goederen en diensten die in een land geproduceerd zijn gedurende een bepaalde periode