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Brethren leader reportedly visited NZ

NZPA

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The world leader of the Exclusive Brethren, Bruce Hales, is believed to have visited Wellington last week.

The visit by the "Elect Vessel" was not confirmed by local Brethren but residents in the suburb of Crofton Downs near the Brethren's Churchill Road Gospel Hall noticed a large security presence at a meeting attended by more than 1000 people on Wednesday, the Sunday Star-Times reported.

A car drove into a marquee erected next to the hall, shielding its occupant from cameras.

A Brethren spokesman told the newspaper there were no discussions about politics at meetings held by the church last week. Seven members of the Exclusive Bethren led a campaign against National's opponents in the 2005 election amid much controversy.

Exclusive Brethren members are prohibited from voting. They have also been criticised for funding pro-Liberal and anti-Greens advertising in Australia.

Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has branded the Exclusive Brethren an extremist cult and criticised former Prime Minister John Howard for meeting Mr Hales.

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