The New Zealand and Australian prime ministers have publicly clashed over the deportation of Kiwi criminals, with Jacinda Ardern calling for Australia to "stop exporting" people.

At a press conference, Ms Ardern told journalists Australia needed to stop sending convicted criminals who had spent most of their lives here back to New Zealand.

"Australia is well within its rights to deport individuals who break your laws, New Zealand does the same," Ms Ardern said.

"But we have a simple request; send back Kiwis, genuine Kiwis. Do not deport your people and your problems."

Ms Ardern and Scott Morrison were in Sydney on Friday for their annual meeting.

The back and forth on deportation, which Ms Ardern said was "corrosive to our relationship", dominated the conference.

The Federal Government has cancelled the visas of 2,633 New Zealand nationals on character grounds over roughly the past five years.

Ms Ardern, who faces an election this year, said some of those sent back were too young when they left New Zealand to have developed criminal tendencies.

"We will own our people, we ask that Australia stop exporting theirs," she said.

She said some people had no connections to New Zealand, making reintegration into society difficult.

"The success of these rehabilitation programs are reliant on a network of people, a network of family and they have none of those," Ms Ardern said.

She said New Zealand was not asking Australia to end its policy, but to afford its Pacific friends some leniency.

Mr Morrison said his government's stance was firm, and that it would expect the same treatment from other countries.

The New Zealand Opposition is threatening to reciprocate and send Australia's criminals back if it comes to power in September.

Mr Morrison indicated that would not be a problem from New Zealand or any other country.

"We would think that was totally understandable and we wouldn't take any offence."

The Prime Minister's message was clear.

"You commit a crime here, you're convicted, once you have done your time, we send you home," he said.

Ms Ardern responded to the comments by saying many people did not feel they were coming home, but being sent away from it.

She said she knew of people who had children in Australia and had lived there for most of the lives before being sent back after serving their time in jail.
"The Prime Minister used a key word in his reference just now, he said that after they serve their time, he sends them 'home'," she said.

"We [New Zealand] have countless that have no home in New Zealand, they have no network, they have grown up in Australia; that is their home and that is where they should stay."

Despite their different views on the matter, both prime ministers said they valued their relationship with one another more than with any other world leader.


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