

News story: DHM Lindsay Skoll's speech at the Hall of Military Glory in Volgograd

Deputy Ambassador Lindsay Skoll said:

As you know, the links between the UK and this great city [Volgograd] are strong and enduring.

They were forged during the Second World War through shared experiences of destruction, devastation and immense bravery. They were started by 900 women in Coventry who sent messages of support and solidarity to their sisters in Stalingrad. The late Queen Mother is an honorary citizen of Volgograd in recognition of the supplies and relief efforts that she organised after the war. The cities of Coventry and Volgograd were the first cities to be twinned in 1944.

And 75 years after the Battle of Stalingrad the mayor of Coventry came here to pay his respects. It is impossible to think how immense the suffering was for the people here in Volgograd and in Stalingrad as it was then called. It was immense suffering with bravery, dignity and the best of human spirit at the worst of times. These are values and shared history we hold really deeply and really dearly. Given the immense suffering of Volgograd and pivotal part it played in the route towards victory, I think it's only fitting that the 2018 World Cup should have Volgograd as one of its host cities.

After all, Volgograd today plays host to people from all over the world including Great Britain who are here in peace and with a common purpose. Thank you.

Q: Is this ceremony a step towards improving ties between Russia and the UK?

A: I think what today demonstrates more than anything is that the enduring nature of the relationship between the UK and Volgograd outweighs any political ups and downs in our relationship.

Q: Record low ticket sales to UK-based England fans for this match tonight. Do you think some fans stayed away because of those political tensions?

A: It's really hard to say. There are a number of factors. Volgograd is quite a distance you get to as I'm sure a lot of you know. But what I do know is that the warmth of the welcome here has been absolutely outstanding. And all the fans have commented on that. Volgograd has just seemed delighted to welcome everybody.

Q: How do you rate sort of the welcome the England fans got? We've talked about Volgograd, but generally here in terms of LGBT fans here as well... there are Black and Asian minorities and ethnicity fans as well. Are you confident that they will be able to have safe and pleasant visit here in Russia?

A: Absolutely. I know that the Russian government and people have made a commitment to FIFA after being selected to host the World Cup here. Everything we've seen has been outstanding in terms of welcome. All the fans I've met have had an absolute terrific time. Volgograd could not be a better host.