

Queen's birthday celebration 2019 in Uganda: High Commissioner's speech

Honourable Prime Minister, Honourable Members of Cabinet, Honourable Ministers and Honourable Members of Parliament, your excellencies and colleagues from the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to you all! Tonight we celebrate the UK's national day and Her Majesty the Queen's 93rd Birthday.

It makes me happy to see such a wide range of Ugandan society and other friends joining us. It is a reminder of the diversity and depth of the relationship between our two countries. We are honoured, proud and grateful for these links, which we do not take for granted. Thank you for coming.

I'm particularly pleased to welcome partners who implement projects on behalf of the British Government, our consular wardens who generously give up their time to help us provide services to British nationals in Uganda, and representatives of the British and Ugandan business communities.

I want to thank the sponsors of this event: Uganda Breweries, G4S, Barclays Bank, Bollore, Cipla Quality Chemicals, Colas, DFCU, FBW, JCB Ganatra, Kibimba, Prudential, Stanbic Bank, Standard Chartered Bank, Texo Compliance, Tullow Uganda and Vivo Energy. They and other member of the private sector are important partners. You have heard me say before that the private sector is the cornerstone for long-term sustainable development. I know that is also a view which the President shares. Understanding and helping the sector and supporting the government to take measures to put in place a stable and predictable environment conducive to business is the best guarantee for Uganda to achieve the Government's aspiration of middle-income status by 2040.

There are a few other people I'd also like to thank. The St John's Ambulance, who are once again helping us tonight – I know some of our guests appreciated your help last year; to the Drum Major and drummers of First Battalion the Coldstream Guards for providing us with a fine display of military music. I also want to make a special mention and thank all my colleagues at the High Commission who have worked so hard to make this evening a success.

There is a lot happening in the UK at the moment. Yesterday, Her Majesty the Queen hosted a number of world leaders at commemorations of the D-Day landings, which took place 75 years ago today. On the sporting front, England and Wales are currently hosting the cricket World Cup – Uganda isn't represented this time but good luck for the next time! Uganda is however represented at the Netball World Cup in Liverpool later this month. We wish the She Cranes great success, including in their opening game against England. The team are here with us tonight, and I'm sure you'll join me in wishing them well.

British Politicians are also grappling with big decisions in relation to our future relationship with the EU. We will need to deal positively with the outcome of these deliberations. But I want to be clear that our focus here meanwhile is on taking forward the whole range of our partnership with Uganda. Let me mention a few highlights from the last 12 months.

Top of the list was the President's two visits to London: for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting; and the conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade after which he was also hosted by the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy at the House of Lords' Business Forum. Also in pursuit of our mutual prosperity, UK Export Finance has now approved £200m credit for the construction of Kampala Industrial Business Park, Namanve; I also was pleased to witness recently an MOU for British companies, notably Alvan Blanch, to supply £120million of Agro-processing equipment to Uganda – a top priority for the President.

On the development front, the UK provided £42 million to assist Uganda in supporting the world's third largest refugee population and local host communities. This included food assistance to over one million people. We continue to support 13 shelters for the victims of gender-based violence, helping 13,000 people a year. Jointly with another donor, we have rolled out senior citizens grants to over 190,000 Ugandans. Importantly, since Uganda is only achieving a return of 70 cents in every dollar invested here, we are giving £20million to improve public investment management and revenue collection, improving Uganda's tax base. We have also worked closely with the Government over the Ebola outbreak in Eastern DRC, providing £7.5million to support preparedness efforts. As someone who experienced the outbreak in West Africa, it is greatly reassuring to witness the work undertaken so far. I commend and congratulate the Government on their leadership, although there is no room for complacency.

We have continued our defence and security cooperation. In the last year British soldiers along with the US, French and Dutch have prepared over 7000 UPDF soldiers for service with AMISOM in Somalia. The UK has spent £3.5 million on projects to support the Uganda Wildlife Authority, including training rangers in the National Parks. We are told this has contributed to an 80% reduction in poaching in Murchison Falls.

And our cultural partnership has flourished: the British Council connects thousands of young creatives in Uganda and the UK to learn critical business skills through its Creative Enterprise programme, has brokered nearly 500 UK Uganda school partnerships and helped improve the quality of learning for nearly 150 000 children in 2018. And at a leadership level, there are 11 Ugandan scholars currently studying under the Chevening Scholarship programme in the UK, taking the total since 1983 to 231 Ugandan Chevening Scholars, many of whom are with us this evening.

We look forward to continuing and expanding this scale of activity. One factor which will send a strong signal to investors will be a positive decision on the Final Investment Decision – a decision by 31 December 2019 will be markedly better than one by 1 January 2020.

Finally, let me flag as a further example of our commitment to genuine collaboration, skills and technology transfer and working to make Uganda's local content policy work, our intention to work in collaboration with the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. We will do this by launching a UK-Uganda High Level Forum on Research, Science, Technology and Innovation. This will increase the impact of the UK's already considerable investment in the sector (some £500 million over 15 years) and identify new areas where we can partner with Ugandan companies and research institutes. In keeping with this theme, I'm delighted that the UK Met Office has provided equipment and training to the Uganda National Metrological Authority in Entebbe. The Director of Forecasting Services, Solomon Mangeni is here tonight: he has promised us good weather for the event!

Also looking ahead, I am delighted that His Excellency will be travelling to the UK in January for the Africa Investment Conference. And next month Uganda will attend the Global Conference for Media Freedom, which we are co-hosting with Canada. Here in Uganda we will continue to work in partnership with government, civil society, the media and business to further the UK-Uganda relationship for our mutual prosperity.

Honourable Prime Minister and distinguished guests, thank you for honouring us with your company. As a symbol of the friendship between our peoples and our countries, may I ask you and all our guests to join me in a toast to His Excellency the President and to the People of Uganda.