

Speech: British High Commissioner's speech at the Kisumu County Assembly

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members,

It is an enormous privilege to address this Assembly today.

The country which I represent cherishes deeply our deep connections to this city and to this beautiful region of Kenya.

I'm told that the very name "Kisumu" comes from words to do with trade. Going to Kisumu meant going to trade. That bespeaks an openness to the world, a diversity, a sense of the city and the county as a great meeting point of people, which are still felt here today.

The United Kingdom's connections with Kisumu go back more than a century. Our shared history has moments of deep pain, and we must live with and respect that. But we recognise too that it has bound us together, and that the connections it has fostered still bind us today.

Kisumu, or Port Florence as the British colonisers briefly called it, was of course the terminus for the great railway which opened up Kenya – the only time, it was said, that a railway had built a nation rather than the other way round.

British agriculturalists helped develop the sugar industry and bring breeds of maize which thrived in this region's rich climate.

British missionaries helped bring formal education to Nyanza. Miss Fanny Moller started by teaching older women in the mornings and encouraging them to send their children in the afternoons. Along with Cannon Pleydell she founded a girls school in Ng'iya, in Siaya, in 1923, one of the very first places in this part of the world which gave a formal education to girls. Ng'iya girls high school still stands there today.

Today this region remains a focus for us as a donor, in an overall programme for Kenya as a whole worth 40 billion shillings every year.

Today I visited a UK-funded health centre helping women make choices about their lives by providing family planning.

I saw another UK-funded project that is working with KMET here in Kisumu to end post-partum haemorrhage – the complications and bleeding after childbirth which still kill too many young mothers in this region.

The UK has distributed millions of bed nets to help families protect themselves from malaria. And we have developed and delivered through pharmacies across Kenya a rapid, finger-prick diagnostic test for malaria, so people with a fever can quickly see whether they indeed have that disease or something else, and can quickly get the right treatment.

We continue to work closely with the county government here and in the region to build their capacity to deliver healthcare. And through networks such as the Tunza clinics we are working to bring that care to the hardest-to-reach areas.

Meanwhile UK Aid is helping bring low-cost private education to areas where the state hasn't reached; to bring more girls and disabled people into sustainable schooling; and to empower girls and young women through programmes such as Premier Skills, which uses football coaching to build confidence and tackle domestic abuse or genital cutting.

Fundamentally, our aid is designed not just to help people today, but to help Kenya build the systems that will allow central and county governments sustainably to provide services themselves in the future.

The Governor and I discussed today how the UK can provide more assistance to the county government of Kisumu to do that, and we will be following that up.

This also means helping build the prosperity which will lift people out of poverty and enable governments to finance the services they need.

Through Trade Mark East Africa, the UK has funded new border posts for example in Busia to speed up trade through this region and help companies make the most of its international connections. That links to work all the way back to Mombasa port which has already cut by several days the time taken to import and export goods through the port, making it cheaper for companies across Kenya to trade.

As the next phase of Kenya's great infrastructure projects works up from Nairobi towards the Lake, the UK will remain closely involved – as an investor and as a development partner working to ensure that those projects deliver real benefits for businesses and wananchi.

We are making development investments in projects that will improve people's lives through innovation. We have put UK money for example into SolarNow, which is bringing small-scale solar power to households and to pump water.

And we will bring more private investment to Nyanza. I have been joined on my visit today by the chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce in Kenya, representing several hundred British companies active here and keen to invest and expand further. He will take the message back too about what is happening in this region and what new possibilities are here.

In Homa Bay, a British firm is building a biogas plant which will turn water hyacinth from the Lake into electric power. Once the power purchase agreement is complete – and I continue to urge the Kenyan government to make progress on this quickly – it will come on line.

Here in Kisumu, East Africa Breweries is building a major new plant which will, once complete, employ hundreds of people directly and support tens of thousands more jobs through its supply chains and distribution networks.

EABL is a company which is not just investing in Kisumu but is driving

development here and across the country. Five years ago, less than half of what went into its Kenya-brewed products was sourced locally. Today 80 percent of its product is local content. That transformation has brought tens of thousands of Kenyan farmers into its supply chains. And the company is already talking to more farmers in this region about how they can supply its new plant.

Mr Speaker,

It is my sense that this region stands at an important point in its history.

A window has opened for political reconciliation, and that is hugely to be welcomed. It can only benefit the people of Kisumu and the region. Already I hear from everyone I have met here how business is picking up and investors are excited about new possibilities.

This region deserves its full share of justice, equality and inclusion, like every part of Kenya and like every Kenyan. And in turn it should play its full role in supporting and strengthening Kenya's institutions, and ensuring they can go about their vital work. Its future lies as one of the country's most dynamic and prosperous areas, contributing its full share to Kenya's success and benefiting in turn fully from the country's shared prosperity.

I reiterate today the United Kingdom's call that reconciliation between political leaders be followed and accompanied by an open, sustained and transparent dialogue involving politicians, religious and civic leaders, and all those with a stake in Kenya's present and its future. Now is the time to deal not just with the aftermath of last year's elections but with the underlying issues which will help this country and this region prosper and develop.

The dialogue of which I speak should include the strengthening of institutions, preventing politicians tearing down and attacking for political gain the common fabric which holds Kenya together. Kenya's democracy is precious, and all Kenyans need to work to protect and strengthen it.

It includes greater accountability and reform of the security services. They have an important job to do maintaining order, and that can be tough. But where people are killed or abuses alleged, they must be transparently investigated and those responsible held to account.

Such a dialogue should include also, in my view, how the workings of devolution can be strengthened and reinforced.

There are I'm sure many other issues – including how Kenya's governance should evolve over the coming years. They are for Kenyans to determine. What I say I say as a friend of Kenya, representing a country deeply invested in its future security and prosperity as a partner. And in that capacity I call again for the follow-up to this month's historic handshake to grapple with the big issues on Kenya's future; and on the leaders of this region to take their full share of responsibility in building the common future which Kenya needs.

Mr Speaker,

It has been an enormous privilege for me to address this assembly today. And as always, it has been a great pleasure to visit this beautiful county of Kisumu.

I pray for success in the work of this Assembly, and for the peace, prosperity and development of this county and this region.

I commit the United Kingdom to doing all we can to support those aims. I will continue to strive to deepen the partnership between my country and your county.