

Speech: DRC: The Ambassador's speech at the 2018 Queen's Birthday Party in Kinshasa

Welcome all to this the celebration of the birthday of our Queen, Elizabeth II.

This is a day of several celebrations. I wish a happy celebration of Eid al-Fitr to all our Muslim friends present. Eid Mubarak!

Today also marks the start of the FIFA World Cup and I congratulate my Russian colleague on his country's victory against the Saudi Arabian team this afternoon.

As you well know, the Leopards of the DRC will not be present in Russia. But we, the Lions of England, will be there on Monday next week, to avenge you against Tunisia. So I ask all Congolese present to support us!

Just like the World Cup, we have our sponsors this evening. I would like to thank them all: our Gold Sponsors – Vodacom and Randgold; our Silver Sponsors – Vlisco; and our Bronze Sponsors – Diageo and G4S. All these businesses have strong links with the UK and contribute considerably to the prosperity of the DRC. I would like you to join me in expressing our gratitude to them by our applause.

This year marks 129 years out of 180 years that we have celebrated having a female Head of State.

Queen Elizabeth is the most remarkable of leaders. During her long reign, she has seen the pendulum of history swing on many issues.

For example, the young like me can only remember dreadful English football teams. But after 65 years on the throne, the Queen can remember handing the World Cup to a world-beating England football team in 1966.

The pendulum swings and I am happy to predict that she will see us bring the World Cup home again in four weeks time.

More seriously, she has viewed the construction of the Berlin Wall and its falling. She has seen the creation of the EU, seen the UK vote to enter and, 45 years later, seen us vote to leave it.

She has endured through all these important moments of our lives. Some have suggested that celebrating her lengthy reign sets a bad precedent for others. Or even a justification for Presidents for life. However the reality is that she has diligently upheld the UK's constitutional arrangements: never stepping over the mark, always conscious of the limits and the responsibilities of her role, carrying out her duties tirelessly.

She has known 13 Prime Ministers, from Winston Churchill, to Theresa May. Each time our government has changed, she has overseen a peaceful and orderly

transfer of power. One of these Prime Ministers, Harold MacMillan, visited Africa in 1960. He spoke of the 'winds of change' that were sweeping through the African continent. He made clear that Britain would not stand in the way of its colonies seeking their independence.

58 years later, it seems a new wind of change is sweeping through Africa. Many nations are rapidly growing in prosperity. Alongside this growing prosperity there is much political change. Many nations are enjoying the benefits of peaceful political transitions. In the last 12 months we have seen peaceful transfers of power in South Africa, Botswana and Angola.

There is change in my own country, too. In 2016 the British people voted in a referendum to leave the European Union. So this is the last QBP that we shall host as a member state of the EU. The referendum was hard fought and the result, whilst clear, was close. Many families, including my own, were split. But politicians and civil servants in the UK are united in agreeing that it is imperative that we respect the will of people and implement their decision.

Our departure from the EU brings new opportunities in our relations with Africa. We will be reinforcing every Embassy in Africa as we look outwards as a Global Britain.

Once the United Kingdom has left the European Union, it is likely we will be free to sign new trade deals with African nations. It's our intention to maintain or increase market access for African nations. I look forward to seeing more Congolese products on the shelves of Tesco and Sainsburys. After Brexit, we'll continue our development policy and a foreign policy which supports the battle against poverty and instability. I'm very proud that the UK is the only country in the OECD that spends 0.7% of GNI on overseas aid and 2.0% on defence and security. As a consequence, across our bilateral and multilateral contributions, we spend over \$1.4m a day in DRC on securing its stability and in helping ordinary people's lives.

What our Department for International Development do here under the UKAid banner is remarkable. DRC is home one of DFID's largest development programmes in Africa. We are particularly proud to be the second largest donor to the humanitarian effort in DRC. Faced with recurrent humanitarian crises, we have provided food, shelter and security to 2.5m people between 2012 and 2017. We will support 3m more people over the next five years, helping to save thousands of lives, even before our recent efforts to support the response to Ebola.

We are not just a humanitarian donor. We work across the whole country to help guarantee services in the fields of health, water, sanitation and education. We also support the private sector, notably in the markets for coffee, cocoa and renewable energy. If you have the time, don't hesitate to pass by 'Elan's' stand here in the garden. Between now and 2020 we will aid more than a million poor people to gain a proper living through supporting entrepreneurs and small producers. Respectful of the sovereignty of Congo, we also have programmes supporting the democratic process here in DRC, including

the current elections.

Let me be entirely clear: the UK does not support any political party in Congo or any potential candidate in the different votes. It belongs to the Congolese people to give their choice in line with their constitution in a manner that is fair, equitable and credible: and that thereafter their choice be respected by all Congolese. We salute the progress realised to date in the electoral process by all the different political actors, including the electoral commission. We stand ready to offer help should it be required – including through our positive response to analyse the ‘voting machines’ that CENI hopes to use. Sometimes, independent technical advice can help bring confidence and consensus.

Since its publication, the published timetable has followed its course, despite some challenges. We therefore look forward to 19 January next year when President Kabila will be the first President in Congo’s history to peacefully hand power to a democratically elected successor. It will be one of the President’s historical legacies. Alas, some dreams for 2018 may not come true. We diplomats have to be realistic and manage expectations. Just like the Congolese must wait till Qatar 2022 to qualify again for the FIFA World Cup, so I think it will take until 2022 before England’s football team lift the Jules Rimet trophy again.

In my dreams it is Congo’s new President (he or she) who will be there at the end of the tournament, applauding the DRC Leopards in their first ever World Cup final, even though they were defeated by their friendly adversaries, the Lions of England.

Before I ask Madam Mabunda to raise a glass to her Majesty the Queen and the British people, I would ask you to join me in raising a toast to the President and the People of the Democratic Republic of Congo.