

Speech: Ghana: British High Commissioner's speech at Her Majesty The Queen's 92nd Birthday Party

Your Excellency, The Minister of Finance

Honorable Ministers and Honorable Members of Parliament, Mr Speaker and Mr Minority Leader.

Your Excellencies and colleagues from the Diplomatic Corps.

Religious leaders, and including the Chief Imam through whom we wish Ramadan Mubarak to all our Muslim guests, with thanks to them for breaking their fast today with us here this evening.

Traditional leaders, with warm greetings to the Okyenhene, to Togbe Afede, the President of the National House of Chiefs, who are here with us this evening, and representatives of the Asantehene.

Niimeɪ, Naameɪ, Nananum, Torgbewo, Mamawo.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Guests, Friends one and all: All Protocols Observed! Akwaaba.

Firstly I'd also like to thank our kind sponsors who helped make this evening possible, particularly: British Airways, Tullow Oil, G4S, Prudential Life Insurance, Vitol Upstream Ghana Ltd, Vivo Energy, Apex Health Insurance, Rendeavour, Contracta, Accra Brewery Limited, Guinness Ghana Brewery, Blue Skies, Voltic, Labadi Beach Hotel, WARA, McVities, DecoKraft, Burger & Relish, TT Brothers, Swiss Spirit Hotel and Suites, Ray Styles, GHOne TV, Xanadu, Shampex Wine Company, Grant & Sons and Global Luxury Shipping. My most sincere gratitude to you all.

While I am in the groove of making "thanks" – I would like to thank the extraordinary team effort of so many unseen people. To the Residence staff who have been making food for days, our gardeners who have doubled down to make this beautiful environment, the countless stage hands, electricians. You may be too many to name; but your efforts have made tonight possible. This is a team game: I want to say thanks to the team. Ayekoo!!

Esteemed guests, we have gathered to celebrate the Queen's Birthday Party. At 92 she's an extraordinary woman and role model. She simultaneously embodies the importance of tradition and evolving modernity.

This year she hosted the Commonwealth Summit in London – re-invigorating an organisation of 53 member states (54 if Zimbabwe re-joins..) and 2.4 billion people spanning six continents. If I may say, it was a touchingly personal toast to the Queen by H.E. The President at the Heads of State dinner when, not least, he recounted the amusing tale, when he was Foreign Minister, of

former President H.E. John Kuffuor getting stuck in the Buckingham Palace lifts with the Duke of Edinburgh 20 years earlier.

As well as the personal warmth, the summit focused on the relevance of the Commonwealth (1 billion people under the age of 25; intra-commonwealth trade of c.\$1trillion dollars by 2020). I'm proud of the drive of both countries – and many others represented here – Towards a Common Future. For example:

1. Prosperity: resisting protectionism and pushing connectivity, on women's economic empowerment, and on digital finance.
2. Sustainability: to radically reduce the volume of plastic in our oceans.
3. Fairness: the provision of at least 12 years of quality education for girls and boys (where Ghana is a leader having guaranteed Free SHS)
4. Security: specifically Cyber Security

But Her Majesty the Queen has been busy. The Commonwealth Summit wasn't the most high profile Royal Event of the last two months. And nor – despite the tens of thousands who attended – was it the most diverse.

In case you missed it, two weeks ago we saw an extraordinary Royal Wedding of the now Duke and Duchess of Sussex – a spell binding encapsulation of what modern Britain is. Tolerant. Multi-faith. Multi-denominational. Inclusive. Confident. Welcoming. I believe our guest list tonight reflects that too.

You probably weren't expecting me to talk about Bishop Michael Curry's sermon in St George's Chapel. I certainly can't deliver it with his fervor and style! Invoking Martin Luther King, Bishop Michael Curry told us not underestimate or over-sentimentalize the Power of Love.

In my first 8 months here as High Commissioner we have certainly been embraced by Ghana: the warmth of the weather matched by the warmth of her people. My wife and children are thrilled, honored to be here. But it is not just that to which I refer. Nor – of the endless love and support of my wife!

In Bishop Michael Curry's words,

There is power in love. And that power in love can change the world and ensure no child goes to bed hungry.

When love is the way, poverty will become history.

He was telling us that when we care, and show we care, we can achieve extraordinary things. I find this rather profound; and – you may be surprised to hear this – directly relevant to UK and Ghana relations. Why?

We often talk about what makes us all different. We should also think about what we have in common. UK & Ghana has a lot in common: I believe we need to actively choose to strengthen those ties for our mutual benefit!

I think we must do more than say we care; our actions must follow. We should understand each other's priorities and invest in them. To make "Beyond Aid"

Beyond Doubt, we should work together even more as trusted partners & friends in all aspects of life.

It is my commitment to you all, that I will do all I can to bring our countries closer together by focusing on our priorities and working together to address them.

In so many ways, her Majesty the Queen truly is the model. For the UK and Ghana – our traditions matter. They shape the very values the people of our countries' cherish: the right to vote, the right to express your opinion, the rule of law – even some elements of protocol!

We need to understand our past. But we must not live in it. We need to look forward and talk about the shared future we want to create. There are 1000 of you here tonight. You – individually – have an important stake in that. If we care about our values, we must not take them for granted.

That is why:

1. As part of our changing £125m pa DfID programme, we are announcing a new £20 million programme to support job creation and economic transformation in Ghana that will help stimulate investment in priority industrial and manufacturing sectors.
2. We are putting money where our mouth is.
 - a. By doubling UKEF support to £1bn to increase trade and investment; attracting responsible investment into Ghana.
 - b. Trebling the development finance available from the UK over the next 3 years from £1.4b to £4.2b.
 - c. Growing our team at the High Commission to support the increased priority of economic development in our work here in Ghana. Looking at, for example, how we can use responsible capital in the City of London to invest here in Ghana.
 - d. Using development finance, through AgDevCo, to supported development of a 10,000 hectare irrigation farm and processing hub in Babator, Brong-Ahafo that could create 3000 new jobs.
3. Continuing to support social sectors where this is adding the most value such as education (helping 250,000 children have a second chance at an education), and supporting thousands of the most vulnerable people across the country, helping them to escape the poverty trap and access and vital community health services, including support of mental health.

I won't list everything here – we have a party to crack on with. In essence we are focused on partnership: with the British Council supporting SMEs; with the Bank of England and Band of Ghana on financial services. With Takoradi and Aberdeen's oil and gas industries. In defense too.

This agenda is one that is built, most importantly of all, on common values.

I was delighted to be in attendance when His Excellency The President visited 10 Downing Street in November for a meeting with Prime Minister May. There was a meeting of minds with a focus on turning "Ghana Beyond Aid" in to practice.

3 months earlier, I had arrived in Ghana to hear HE the President was “in a hurry”. So am I. We need to crack on. Now is the time for us to prioritize efforts, and accelerate through implementation so that we can, together, renew our partnership to meet the opportunities and challenges which lie ahead.

I’ve already talked of love: a subject you’d least expect from the prudish Brits. But, surely, no British High Commissioner or Ambassador worth his salt can speak at the Queen’s Birthday Party without referencing Shakespeare who said:

If music be the food of love: play on.

I reckon Shakespeare was talking about Ghanaian music. The music, the artists in Ghana are incredible. We Brits share your love Sarkodie, Fuse ODG, Shatta Wale, IamKingPromise, Kidi, Stormzy, Stoneboy, Becca and for the sensational Reggie n’ Bollie and Wiyaala who have joined us here this evening.

The Ghana music industry has great talents and also has a lot of potential to grow bigger and better. To help this home grown talent, I think more can be done to establish better systems and structures (such as is now being seen in Nigerian and South Africa) where artists, managers and labels can be confident to collect royalties. Perhaps UK equivalent royalty collection organisations like PPL (Phonographic Performers Limited) and PRS for music (Performing Rights Society) can share experience?

Talking with Reggie n’ Bolli and Wiyaala over recent months I’m struck by – again – not what makes us different but how much we have in common. Ability to dance and sing (sadly) make us different. But what we share is a view that:

Individually we can all hope to achieve things and make a difference. But we all need a little humility. Because none of us know it all. And unless we work together – in our ways, within our own networks, we’ll forever struggle. But if we all understand each other better, we can collectively make a difference.

As Tourism Ambassadors for the Government of Ghana, Reggie ‘n’ Bollie are keen to for people in the UK and elsewhere to understand the richness of the culture, the beauty of the land and the warmth of the people. I want to do that too. In our own ways – with many of you here tonight – we can collectively make a difference.

As many of you will know “Wiyaala” is in fact Sissala for “the do-er”. She is a peerless achiever, talented artist and powerful force and advocate for women’s rights. During my time in Ghana I want to be a do-er. I want to be called “Wiyaala” too!

In a world of cynics and armchair commentators, we need optimists and people arguing for positive change. All of our artists tonight walk the talk.

As we do that we need to respect what makes us different. Then double-down on what unites us; on what makes us strong, trusted friends.

As we saw in the Royal Wedding: the UK is a diverse, welcoming, forward-looking Global meeting point. I hope you feel the same of the British High Commission, and specifically here at the Residence this evening.

Thank you. Medaase.

Happy 92nd Birthday to Her Majesty the Queen!