

Speech: High Commissioner's speech at the 2017 Queen's Baton Relay opening event, Lusaka

We are today celebrating the arrival of the Queen's Baton to Zambia. The 2018 Queen's Baton Relay was launched on 13 March at Buckingham Palace by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as part of Commonwealth Day celebrations. This happy event marked the start of its 388-day journey through all Commonwealth countries and territories before it ends its journey in Australia for the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games next year.

The baton last came to Zambia in 2014, when the then British High Commission, James Thornton, joined its journey through this country. I am pleased to be part of today's event. The Queen's Baton is a powerful symbol of the unity and diversity of the 52 Commonwealth nations. It carries a special message from the Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. The message will be read out on completion of the baton's epic journey at the Commonwealth games in Australia's Gold Coast in April, 2018. No one knows what the message says until then.

Since the beginning of the Commonwealth Games back in 1930, I understand that Zambia has participated in all the games from 1974, and won some medals. Zambia should be proud of having produced medal winners, such as the late Lotti Mwale, who won the first gold medal in 1974 in Christchurch, New Zealand.

I have enjoyed watching previous Commonwealth Games and the athletes in action. What I find striking is that the Commonwealth Games bring together able-bodied and Paralympic sport. They are a true reflection of the Commonwealth's values of inclusiveness and diversity. One of the outcomes of London 2012 Olympics was how it not only brought the nation together, but how it inspired and changed attitudes on diversity, inclusion and disability.

Sport has a unique power to promote teamwork, fairness, respect and a sense of achievement, apart from the well intended rivalry and competition. Sport can be a unifying force; it is apt that this year's Commonwealth theme is of a Peace-Building Commonwealth. I hope this relay will help encourage Zambians to feel a sense of togetherness as the baton passes through the streets of Lusaka, sharing a taste of the excitement and opportunities of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

I believe the Gold Coast Games 2018 will be equally as successful as Glasgow 2014. I look forward to watching the sporting rivalry, particularly between the UK and Zambia, but let the best team win, and may Zambia bring back many medals.

Thank you