

Speech: High Commissioner's speech at the Queen's Birthday Party, Brunei 2017

Yang Berhormat Dato Seri Setia Awang Haji Bahrin bin Abdullah, Minister of Development at the Prime Minister's Office and Yang Mulia Pengiran Datin Hajah Noorsiah binte Pengiran Hamdan

Pengiran Pengiran, Pehin Pehin, Dato Dato , Datin Datin: Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the United Kingdom's 2017 celebration of Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday.

In February this year, Her Majesty The Queen became the first British Monarch to commemorate a Sapphire Jubilee, after 65 years on the throne. Later this year, His Majesty The Sultan and Yang Di Pertuan will commemorate His Golden Jubilee. Together they are now the two longest reigning sovereigns in the world. In celebrating these signal achievements we warmly acknowledge the lifetime of dedication and service Their Majesties have given to Their respective Peoples.

This evening, in celebrating Her Majesty's 91st Birthday, the theme of our Reception is the Forest and how this links the United Kingdom and Brunei Darussalam, as well as to the wider Commonwealth. Appropriately enough, we are holding this event during Earth Week.

In 2015, at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy initiative was launched, to mark The Queen's Service to the Commonwealth. The aim is to involve all 52 countries of the Commonwealth and to help protect one of the world's most important natural habitats – forests.

A selection of photographs of Brunei's dedications to the QCC

We are delighted that Brunei has agreed to commit three separate forest reserves to the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy:

- Berakas Forest Recreation Park, Berakas Forest Reserve;
- Ulu Temburong National Park, Batu Apoi Forest Reserve; and
- Pulau Selirong Forest Recreation Park, Pulau Selirong Forest Reserve.

We have on display a series of striking images of flora and fauna taken in these three reserves. I am pleased that two of the photographers – Bud Chapman and Dilshan Mahdi Hussainmiya – are able to be with us this evening.

Brunei's unique rainforest has inspired British artists over the years.

Boyd and Evans painting of Brunei's rainforest from HSBC Brunei

In 1991, Fionnuala Boyd and Les Evans, a husband-and-wife team, were invited, as artists-in-residence at the Royal Geographical Society, to join the Universiti Brunei Darussalam's Brunei Rainforest Expedition. During the expedition, they produced a series of paintings to celebrate the subjective experience of the forest, to accompany the scientific data that was also being collected. They spent two months at the Kuala Belalong Field Studies Centre in Temburong. I am pleased to say that, courtesy of HSBC, we have one of their large canvases on display this evening. Their work can be found in UK Museums such as Tate Britain.

But in recent decades artists have also been keen to see their works displayed in less traditional public spaces. Last December, a painting inspired by Brunei's jungle was posted across King's Cross London Underground Station. The painting was produced by a young British artist, Jake Grewal, based in South London, who won the "Art for the Underground" competition, a project to help young artists promote their work. Jake painted this work following a trip to Brunei. The image shown on the London Underground is here this evening, as well as one of his original canvases loaned to us by Jake's cousin, Julia Morel. I like to think that the vibrant colours in the Underground poster will have lifted the spirits of weary London commuters on a winter's day and perhaps even encouraged some to visit Brunei.

Paintings of Brunei's rainforest by a young British artist, Jake Grewal, based in South London, who won the "Art for the Underground" competition

As well as inspiring British artists, the Brunei Rainforest has been an important area of study for British scientists working alongside Bruneian scientists, over many decades, to research this country's rich biodiversity. We congratulate schools and other local organisations for the work they do in encouraging young people in Brunei to understand and value their pristine forests. We admire Brunei's participation in and commitment to the Heart of Borneo initiative. We will continue to follow with great interest developments in Temburong – often described as the Green Jewel of Brunei – which offer a wonderful opportunity to showcase Brunei's commitment to sustainable and green development.

Last year, Royal Brunei Armed Forces celebrated its 55th anniversary. The British Armed Forces are proud to have served continuously alongside RBAF for those 55 years. They regularly train and exercise together and conduct defence engagement tasks in the Asia Pacific region. Brunei's forests also serve as an important training location. On display in this room is a large photograph of 12 soldiers from the Household Cavalry – more often associated in people's minds with their plumed helmets and ceremonial uniforms on occasions such as Changing of the Guard – but in the picture they are heavily camouflaged in the Brunei jungle. If you can't spot all 12 you can find the solution on our High Commission Facebook Page. More seriously, the Garrison has a permanent Jungle Training School. Last month, the UK and Brunei jointly hosted a Jungle Training Symposium. That was one of the events highlighted when His Majesty The Sultan graced the Garrison with a visit in March to mark the upcoming departure of the 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles as they shortly end their current tour of duty. Pictures from these events will be shown on the screens behind me.

For this evening's Queen's Birthday Party, I want to thank the Empire Hotel and my own staff for their unstinting efforts in organising this evening's programme. My warm thanks also go to our generous sponsors Ben Foods, which supplies excellent British produce to Supa Save, as well as to the individuals and organisations responsible for the visual displays. I would like to thank the two choirs – from Maktab Duli and the Military Wives in Brunei – for singing the two anthems and to the two Gurkha ceremonial pipers. Also my grateful appreciation to the Garrison for their work in creating such an atmospheric display at the entrance to this room.

Finally, my thanks once again to Yang Behormat Dato and to Pengiran Datin for gracing this occasion as our Guests of Honour. Sadly for me, this will be the last time I have the privilege to host the Queen's Birthday Party in Brunei. As for all of us who have the pleasure to spend time in the Abode of Peace my fond memories will certainly include the green, pristine Brunei Darussalam captured in the imagery around us.

Thank you.