

Speech: Parliament Valedictory Address

New Zealand Parliament Buildings, Wellington hosted by Rt Hon Trevor Mallard, Speaker of the House of Representatives and New Zealand Institute of International Affairs 5:45PM Monday 20 June.

BEGINS

Acknowledgements

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e ngā iwi, e rau rangatira mā, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Ka nui te mihi o te ngākau ki a koutou katoa.

I'd like to acknowledge the Speaker, who has been a great friend in my time here in Wellington, committed to strengthening the relationship with the UK, and Parliament's links with the world at large –despite the Covid constraints. Thank you Trevor for hosting this event today. And I'd like to and congratulate you on 35 years of service, and wish you all the very best for your diplomatic posting to an as yet undisclosed country...!

I acknowledge my fellow members of the diplomatic corps, and all they do to sustain and strengthen international relations.

And a mihi also to Parliament itself, te Whare Paremata, and all those who work in it: security guards, MPs and Ministers, researchers, journalists.. I've been to some wonderful events here, had some great conversations, and always feel welcome.

Thank you also to NZIIA for the initiative for this event. There is a nice symmetry to it. My first major speech in New Zealand was at an NZIIA conference in February 2018: my brief was to consider whether the rules based order was fit for purpose. So it's nice to be doing my final speech with NZIIA – and I'd like to pay tribute to the Institute and all its members for the part you play in maintaining a focus on international affairs.

Introductions

In my speech on the rules based order in 2018 I started, I think, by revealing how I first met my kiwi husband, and how his chat up line, at my housewarming party in Hackney, was about Francis Fukuyama and the end of history: the thesis that liberal democracies had won out, that the period of ideological contestation was over...

So I thought I could return to the theme of geopolitics in this speech, to give an updated take on the Rules Based Order in this increasingly dangerous world – and talk about the UK-NZ relationship in that context.

But I started writing that speech and – to be honest – it was a bit boring. Well maybe not boring exactly – but I've given speeches like that before, and

they're out there on the internet to be read.

And then my 10 year old daughter – the acting one – has just finished filming Netflix's first ever interactive, 'choose your own adventure' style romcom, where you choose what path the story takes next.

So I thought if this was an interactive, choose your own adventure speech, and if our starting point is that party, 20 years ago, in my house in Hackney, with the kiwi actor chatting me up with his hot takes on international politics – which direction would you, the audience, want the speech to take next?

Should we take the international politics route? Or the love affair: the beginning of a beautiful relationship with Aotearoa New Zealand?

Judging by Twitter, where my tweets on substantial policy issues get barely a nod, while tweets about cats or hair or kids or – dare I say it – bucket fountains – elicit quite a bit more interest, I decided for you: we're going romcom, rather than war and peace. This will be more Rose Matafeo's Starstruck, than Band of Brothers...

So I'm going to talk about my connection with NZ, the highlights of my time here – and where I think the UK-NZ relationship is now. I hope that, along the way, I will cover enough substance so as to not embarrass the esteemed Institute of International Affairs...

The NZ connection

So – back to Hackney, and how meeting that kiwi actor sparked a love affair with this country on the exact opposite side of the world. As a student of international relations, then a young British diplomat I began to take an interest in New Zealand that was disproportionate to (please forgive me) its presence in my masters curriculum.

I came on holiday here nine times. We kayaked the Abel Tasman, sky-dived over fox glacier, walked the Routeburn Track. Got engaged in the Bay of Islands. We brought back one child after another after another.

And people would say: do you think you'll ever come and live in NZ? And we'd joke – maybe when they make me British High Commissioner. It was a joke because it seemed so ridiculously unlikely: I didn't really fit the mould, back then, of British High Commissioners to New Zealand.

But then the stars somehow aligned (not least as I told everyone who would listen that this job had my name on it), and I got the job. And it has been every bit as wonderful as I hoped: both professionally, but also personally – for us as a family.

The UK-NZ Relationship

My job here (beyond of course my Pitcairn responsibilities) has been to do all I can to strengthen the UK-NZ Relationship. Beyond – that is – of the

very basic contribution of marrying a kiwi, and adding three more kiwi-brits to the world.

I've said before that a few decades back there was – I think – a sense of benign neglect, in both directions, between the UK, Australia, NZ. We were like old loyal friends who took each other somewhat for granted. That's not to say there wasn't a huge amount going on: the family and people to people connections. The OE. Sporting rivalry. Co-operation in the Commonwealth, in the Five Eyes.

But underneath the surface there was some longstanding hurt: a sense – that has been raised with me countless times – that the UK turned its back on NZ when it joined the EEC in 1973. Deeply felt grievances about which airport queue kiwis joined at Heathrow – which seemed not to recognise that we are family. Hurts too about historical wrongs, from first encounters and British colonisation. And a sense that the UK had stepped back too much from its friends and partners in the South Pacific region, and that NZ, too, was more focused on its near abroad, on its big relationships in Asia, and less invested in Europe.

That sense of taking each other for granted changed quite a while ago, I think, with a renewed appreciation – pre-dating the Brexit referendum – of the need to invest more in relationships with partners who share your values, as the world became more and more uncertain.

And then there was Brexit.

Brexit was an enormous disruption – both for the UK, where it constitutes massive constitutional change, and has been greatly contested – but also for our partners, both in our European neighbourhood, and beyond.

It's worth taking a moment to differentiate, I think, between the different motivations of those who campaigned for Brexit: there were those for whom it was an opportunity to put up the barriers, revert to a UK gone by, and reduce immigration. But there were those also for whom our EU membership prevented the UK from being as global as it really wanted to be: from having its own international trade policy, for example. And it is the latter form of 'globalist Brexiteers', who make up the British Government. They wanted the UK to be more global, not less.

Of course Brexit was always going to be complex, and there remains much to be resolved in terms of arrangements on the island of Ireland, in particular. And I'd like to acknowledge the disruption and challenge (and pain) that it has caused to our friends and neighbours in Europe. To our European family.

But on this side of the world, in New Zealand and the Pacific, the disruption of Brexit has brought real opportunities.

UK-NZ Free Trade Agreement

The biggest, of course, was the prospect of a post-Brexit Free Trade Agreement. NZ was identified early on as a priority: not (and I've got in

trouble for saying this in the past – but it’s true!), by virtue of its scale and economic heft, but because NZ is an innovator in global trade policy, because it bats above its average – and because we are close, longstanding friends and partners.

So I came here talking big talk about how we would do an FTA during my tour. But sometimes it felt like we wouldn’t manage it at all. I remember one morning talking about Brexit on the Morning Report, and Susie Ferguson went live to the Houses of Parliament in London, where MPs were rejecting PM May’s Brexit Deal. “The no’s have it, the no’s have it”. Then back to me: “so what does this mean, High Commissioner?”.

But we did then actually Brexit – in February 2020. We then launched UK-NZ negotiations in June 2020, reached agreement in principle in October 2021, and signed in February 2022. That’s pretty good going, by any assessment: and I’d like to pay tribute to all those involved: to the MFAT and DIT negotiators, who did almost all of it virtually, either late at night or early morning. To businesses and commentators here, who engaged, supported – and of course challenged!

And it is a Free Trade Agreement that we can all be proud of. It is far reaching on goods. It is innovative on services – future proofed, we hope – for the development of our economies in the future. It is far reaching on mobility between our countries. And it has provisions that speak to the historic closeness of our relationship, and the things that we as nations and people value and hold dear:

- Ambitious provisions on environment and trade
- High standards on animal welfare
- Māori economic trade and co-operation chapter
- A Gender and Trade chapter

It shows the UK walking the talk of being a liberal, free trading nation. It speaks to the connections between our peoples, and our ambition to further strengthen them – and build our prosperity. And it might – perhaps – let us move on from the hurt of 1973.

The FTA also paves the way for the UK’s accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, which will increase prosperity for all CPTPP members, and the UK, and link the UK more closely into this part of the world.

It also provides the foundation for a strategic partnership between the UK and New Zealand on global trade issues, bringing together New Zealand’s strengths in innovating in trade policy, with the UK’s scale and global heft. We can work more closely together at the WTO, on WTO reform, and on shared priorities: New Zealand co-sponsored a UK-led joint statement on food security; the UK signed New Zealand’s MC12 statement on Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform, and NZ joined a Trade Ministers Meeting on Economic and Trade Support for Ukraine, convened by the UK. Most recently, after extended negotiations only last week, we worked together at MC12 to restore faith in the WTO with agreement reached on Pandemic Preparedness and the availability of vaccines,

E-Commerce, Food Security, and with Minister O'Connor chairing discussions on eliminating fisheries subsidies – an area close to both our hearts as seafaring island states.

Climate

Beyond trade, we've worked together on climate change and sustainability: issues which, to me, loom larger than any other. Because if your world is not functioning, if your home is no longer habitable for vast swathes of the population – what point the rest of our endeavours?

The science tells us – as indeed does our lived experience – that this is the critical decade for the future of our planet. Devastating heatwaves in India and Pakistan – with temperatures beyond what the human body can endure. Floods here on the West Coast. Wildfire, rising sea levels that pose an existential threat to Pacific Island nations in this neighbourhood. We know that – to avoid catastrophe – we need to halve emissions by 2030 to keep global warming within 1.5 degrees.

New Zealand has a hill to climb: In 2019 gross greenhouse gas emissions were 26% higher than 1990. Transport emissions have risen by 85% between 1990 and 2019, and agricultural emissions make up around 50% of your total.

We have done a lot together – before my time and during – on climate change. Sharing UK experience and expertise as NZ brought in its own climate change legislation and architecture – modelled on the UK. Working with Government, business, finance, the NGO sector and the media in the run up to the UK's hosting of COP26.

And I'm delighted that NZ has committed to reduce emissions by 50% by 2030, laid the foundations for those reductions in its emissions reduction plan, and quadrupled its climate finance assistance. And delighted that this has broad bipartisan consensus. But the really hard work starts now.

And it's always tempting to give reasons why we can't go further, faster. How we're already doing a good job, compared with others. Each country, each industry, has its own brand of exceptionalism. But we know – in our hearts – that we can't afford to go slow. So I'd like to mihi to all those who make this their life's work, who work with dogged determination, with determined optimism, to make the change that we owe our children and our children's children.

And I'd like to draw a parallel to trade – where NZ does all it can to pull together, across Government, society, and all sectors of the economy – to deliver on an ambitious trade agenda overseas, and deliver prosperity at home. Where NZ is recognised and respected, internationally, for innovating, for batting above its average. And I'd like to suggest – in this choose your own adventure world – that you could choose to do the same in the climate space: mainstreaming climate considerations across government, business and finance. Innovating, leading by example, greening your exports, transforming your economy – and being a beacon and support for climate vulnerable countries everywhere.

Security and shared values

The principle of kaitiakitanga, of tackling climate change, protecting our environment for future generations, is just one of the values that the UK and New Zealand share and hold dear. We also value the proper operation of international law, sovereignty, human rights and democracy, sustainable development.

We share an assessment and view of the world and its dangers, and work together across the board. The UK has doubled its diplomatic presence in the South Pacific in the past few years, and we are co-located with New Zealand in three out of our six High Commissions, coordinating closely on the ground – whether in response to political developments, or crises such as the Tonga volcanic eruption. And there is more we can do together with Pacific partners on issues that matter to them such as resilience and long term sustainability.

We also work together in Asia Pacific – for example as common ASEAN Dialogue Partners – and in the wider world: through our shared membership of the UN, the Commonwealth, the Five Eyes Grouping, the WTO...

And we think as one when international law is violated.

When Vladimir Putin's Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February, we rallied to support Ukraine. With a diplomatic campaign to condemn Russia's aggression and violation of Ukrainian sovereignty; by providing humanitarian and lethal aid to Ukraine, and by sanctioning key figures in the Russian regime – the Russia sanctions being a first for New Zealand.

We know that what is happening in Europe has implications not just for Europe, and European security, but for Indo-Pacific security, for the whole world, and for the operation of the rules based system.

We know that if one strong man breaks international law, and violates the sovereignty of his neighbour, and that violation goes unpunished, it will set the most dangerous precedent.

And In a decade when the combined GDP of autocratic regimes is expected to exceed the combined GDP of democracies; when we know that autocracies are more likely to go to war, commit mass human rights abuses, trigger mass migration; then those who share values and a view of the world need to work more closely together than ever.

There was perhaps a time when NZ felt – by virtue of size, distance or policy settings –protected from the threats of the world. That that is no longer clear is abundantly clear. We are none of us protected – and we all need to do our utmost.

We need to invest in our military capability, and in our ability to deter aggression, and defend ourselves. Deterrence is not a dirty word, it's a necessity. We need to build our economic resilience and energy security. We need to wield our economic tools such as sanctions, development assistance,

our educational links, our networks and soft power – to help strengthen and shore up democracies, the rule of law and human rights. To support countries in asserting their own sovereignty, and in upholding the international principle of one country one vote – guarding against a return to an era where might is right. We can't assume our freedoms will endure: we need to actively choose – and work – to protect them.

People to People connections

Underpinning these shared values, and the shared view of the world and its threats, are of course the people to people connections between our countries. The ease with which our diplomats work in each other's ministries – or embassies around the world – and have the right to roam. The sporting rivalry and highs and lows. The research collaborations which served us so well during the pandemic – and will help us stay ahead of the technologies and threats of the future. The OE, which I hope is about to burst back into life.

The connections between our countries are broad and deep.

I am clear, though, that you can't ever be complacent in a relationship. We can't take each other for granted. Because the demographics – in both our countries – are changing all the time, as our societies become increasingly multicultural. Those kiwis who trace their heritage to the UK are fewer than in years gone by, the links more distant. So we need to redouble our efforts – building connections with all NZ-ers – those of European and Māori whakapapa, Asian New Zealanders, Pasifika. And we need to keep making the case afresh, for new generations, – about why this relationship matters, and what it delivers for our people.

Some of the most meaningful work I've done in my time here, one of the things I'm most proud of, has been our work to strengthen the connections and relationships between the High Commission – and the UK writ large – and te ao Māori. Building our own cultural capability and confidence – in te reo and tikanga. Building links with iwi Māori and Māori business. And – at the request of the descendants of those killed – acknowledging – and expressing regret for – deaths caused in the First Encounters in 1769.

I learnt – afresh – the importance of putting myself in others' shoes, seeing the world from their perspective. Seeing the view – in 1769 – not just from the ship, but from the beach. And I learnt – afresh – that you can only build a trusting relationship, and co-operation, if you know and understand your past: kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua – I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on my past.

And we are also building lots of future-focused co-operation: on trade, with the first ever Māori trade and economic co-operation chapter in our FTA; with a te taiao kahui, to ensure that Māori (indigenous) perspectives had a platform and were incorporated into the work at COP26 in Glasgow. And on culture, where we have strengthened the connections between iwi Māori and museums in New Zealand, with the cultural institutions in the UK that house taonga Māori. There is more to be done: but we are making progress.

Personal

Beyond the professional, the work that I have done, the relationships I have built as British High Commissioner, it has been the most wonderful time for us personally, as a whānau.

For my husband Toby to live and work in the country in which he grew up and – through his work on international environmental work at MFAT – to play his part in New Zealand's efforts to change the world for the better.

For my kids to become proper kiwis – not just visiting on holiday – and for all of us to have this time with my in-laws, with our kiwi family. To have travelled the length and breadth of this beautiful country, and run in its hills, swum in its seas, canoed its rivers. And to have made friends for life.

So there are lots of reasons to be glad about that housewarming party in Hackney – not least, for me, the connection I have built with this wonderful country and its people.

And even though we are going home to the UK, to a new chapter in this Choose Your Own Adventure life of ours, this is home now too – and always will be.

Kei te mihi o te ngakau mo koutou i manaaki mai i a matou. Thank you – from the bottom of our hearts – for your hospitality.

Noreira, tēna koutou, tēna koutou, tēna tātou katoa.

ENDS