

Speech: Penny Mordaunt speech at the Kenyan Chamber of Commerce

Thank you.

Principal Secretary, Professor Low, Mr Chairman, members of the Chamber.

I am delighted to be here today to contribute to your discussions on the future of Global Britain and to celebrate the UK's flourishing economic relationship with Kenya.

I want to begin by thanking the Chairman and members of the British Chamber of Commerce Kenya for hosting us here today; for the enormous contribution you make to the economies of Kenya and the UK; and the inspiring example that you are setting here in East Africa.

As members of the British business community here in Kenya, you have a unique understanding of the strong economic ties between our countries.

You see the potential for these ties to grow and develop.

You understand that the UK must move away from a relationship with Africa that is dominated by aid, and towards one that embraces the power of economic growth and delivers mutual prosperity.

And you understand that sustained, job-creating growth will play a vital role in lifting people out of poverty, and allow Kenya to realise its ambition of economic independence.

You know that great changes are underway, both here in Kenya and at home.

This is a really exciting moment for the UK's partnership in Africa and around the world.

As we prepare to leave the EU and enter a new phase of international engagement, we will renew our focus on our African relationships.

There are abundant opportunities across the continent, and nowhere more than in Sub-Saharan Africa. These opportunities will only grow over the next twenty years.

We want to ensure complete coherence on our approach, and we are determined to ensure that our efforts across the continent become more than the sum of their individual parts.

We are also determined to ensure that our renewed focus on Africa's economic development delivers jobs, investment and trade.

For both the UK and Kenya, this presents a tremendous opportunity.

When we talk of growth in Africa, we risk limiting our outlook to the large economies at either end of the continent. But Kenya should not be overlooked.

In recent years, it has dramatically improved its 'ease of doing business' rankings, rising 30 places in the last three years on the World Bank's global index.

The country has an impressive growth rate – greater than most of its neighbours and many developing countries. It has an immense appetite for economic expansion and diversification. It acts as a critical regional hub, providing trade access to 200 million people across seven countries.

And Kenya's reputation for innovation spreads across the continent. It is leading the charge in sectors, such as mobile money, and transforming lives across Africa.

As with all growing economies, we know that there are still hurdles to jump. But no one can deny that Kenya is a profound success story – the largest and most diverse economy in East Africa. Throughout this journey, the UK has stood beside Kenya every step of the way.

The British government's support has driven essential policy and regulatory changes that have helped Kenya and its neighbours power ahead in recent years.

We have delivered transformational reforms to the country's ports, borders and infrastructure; to facilitate trade across the region; and have helped harness the use of technology to improve services and help businesses to reach their customers, including those who might otherwise have been left behind.

Our commercial impact in Kenya is without equal.

The UK is the largest cumulative investor in Kenya, and the fourth exporter of goods.

British companies, both local and global, rank among Kenya's most successful and respected firms.

We contribute an enormous proportion of tax revenue to Kenya; seven of the top ten corporate tax payers in this country are British companies, and the revenue they generate delivers investment across the breadth of the Kenyan government's priorities, changing the lives of Kenyans as their country grows.

British companies directly employ a quarter of a million Kenyans and are growing the job market. Just recently, Chamber member East African Breweries Ltd / Diageo announced a new site that will bring over 100,000 jobs to the Kenyan economy and shows that British investment is not limited to the major cities.

Our investment travels through Kenyan society more than other countries,

because our firms reinvest significant revenues in their local communities and value chains.

Unilever, which was recently rated Kenya's top employer for the fourth time in a row – an incredible achievement that demonstrates the company's commitment to its workforce.

And GSK, which has reinvested 20% of profits from its African interests to train community healthcare workers and combat childhood mortality.

These are just two examples of the tremendous work of members of this Chamber.

These companies represent the best of British investment. They set a gold standard with their business practices, and in doing so they send a powerful message about British standards and our commitment. They demonstrate the real impact of British commercial engagement on the country's economic and social progress.

Across the UK government, we are determined to ensure that we support British companies abroad in every way possible, to boost the economies of both countries and the lives of Kenyan people. On the way here from the airport this morning, I was delighted to visit the Hela garment factory.

Opened just 18 months ago it already employs over 4,000 people. It has invested heavily in corporate social responsibility, introducing a safe water programme, child care facilities and free lunches for its staff. Other companies in the export zone now follow their example, and Hela's team already provides training and support for its fellow companies to deliver their own CSR programmes.

Hela is a world leader in responsible manufacturing and sets the standard for others in East Africa to follow. They are working in partnership with the British government to advise Kenya on how it can grow the manufacturing sector to deliver the best conditions, not just for businesses like theirs, but for the Kenyans who work for them.

To ensure that this ripple effect is also felt beyond the manufacturing sector, UK aid is also partnering with the government to create more comprehensive Special Economic Zones, allowing companies – not only those who export – to flourish and grow, bringing jobs and wealth to Kenya.

We want British commercial and government expertise to play its part in preparing Kenya's economy for its next phase of growth.

We will continue to invest and scale up our trade initiatives like Trade Mark East Africa, to tackle barriers and to increase the potential for trade success across the region. And we will continue to grow CDC.

We will increase our infrastructure development funds, building the crucial pathways for trade and investment and removing obstacles to the economic expansion we all want to see.

We will launch our five-year urban programme to unlock both development and commercial opportunities at the sub-national level, responding to the opportunities that Kenya's devolution brings.

And we will enhance our modern partnership with the Government of Kenya to strengthen the bilateral economic relationship and long term prosperity of both countries.

We are building a great team to do this work, including experts on trade policy, export finance and investment.

I am delighted that many government colleagues and implementing partners are here with us today, demonstrating our commitment to a whole of government approach on this important issue.

I hope you will take the opportunity to talk to them about opportunities to partner in your areas of expertise. You are part of the team too. We cannot do this without you.

The support of the British business community will be crucial to the success of a new, modern UK-Kenya partnership.

We need you to keep doing all that you are doing. Keep growing the economy, keep creating jobs, keep setting world class standards.

Please share your success stories. The British are famously bad at 'blowing our own trumpets' – but I ask you to promote your successes. This will build confidence in Kenya's potential and show others what can be achieved. And tell us what you need. If there are changes that need to be made or areas where you need support, talk to our team. They are there to help.

We have a huge opportunity to shape the health, wealth and prosperity of the nation in a way that grows and protects the economy of the UK too.

Our development, diplomatic and commercial investment here has helped to create a self-sufficient economy and a powerful trading partner for the future. The UK should be enormously proud of that.

Kenya now stands strong and we must transition our relationship to a new, modern footing, for the mutual prosperity of our two great nations.

Thank you for the part that you are playing in that and the part you will play in the future.