

Speech: Queen's birthday celebration 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya: Nic Hailey's speech

[Protocols]

Welcome to this celebration of the Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

It is traditional at these occasions to speak of the high-level exchanges between our two great countries; the facts and figures; the MoUs signed and projects approved.

Those things are important. But they matter only because of the difference they make to people's lives. The story of even one human being cannot be told in a speech. But if I had time today, here are some of the stories I'd tell you about the UK and Kenya.

I'd speak of the woman in Turkana who gets a regular cash payment that she can use how she chooses – to support her family, maybe start a small business or send a child to school. If the rains fail, she gets a bit more. At first it came from UK Aid, but now two-thirds of the money comes from the Kenyan Government – and soon all of it will, building a social security system that gives protection and dignity to hundreds of thousands of Kenya's poorest people.

I'd tell the story of the moran in Isiolo, who struggled to get a good price for his cattle – and too often ended up selling them, skin and bones, to a middle man, when drought or hardship made him desperate. Now he takes his animals to a fattening programme on Borana ranch, set up with UK support, where they spend three months getting to market weight. He keeps 90% of the extra profit that brings him. The girls in his community used to sing about morans who rustled cattle from a rival tribe. Now they sing a song about the guy who got 80,000 bob for a fat bull.

I'd tell you about Ali, who lives in Kakuma refugee camp with his family. Ali's visual impairment meant he had never learnt basic skills; he was struggling. UK Aid provided him with six months' intensive adult literacy, numeracy and business skills training, and with a solar panel. That now powers Ali's kiosk in Kakuma town, which makes him 2 to 3 thousand shillings a day. He has gone from being stigmatised for his disability to becoming a respected member of his community.

Among all these thousands of stories that connect us, I'd tell one about the Kenyan soldier sent off to Somalia to fight al-Shabaab. On this deployment, he and his comrades are safer because they know how to recognise and deal with roadside bombs, thanks to the training they've received at a UK-funded centre.

I'd speak also of the British squaddie who, at 19, had never left his home country until he came to train here in Kenya – and of the things he saw here that forever changed his perspective on the world.

In a more serious tone, I'd talk of the children who, for the first time ever, were able to testify from Kenya via video link to a British court about the disgusting abuse they suffered from a man who thought Kenya was a place where you could get away with it. Their abuser got almost 20 years in prison as a result. And they got justice.

Then to cheer us up again, I'd tell you about how the people who created M-PESA ten years ago, through a British and Kenyan company supported by DFID, came back to create M-KOPA, putting affordable solar lighting in half a million Kenyan homes. And about the kids who can now do their homework after sunset as a result. I'd talk about the lady engineers who mill tungsten darts in Athi River industrial area, in a process so sophisticated and secret they wouldn't even let me see it when I visited. Who knew that two-thirds of the world's tournament-standard dartboards were made from Kenyan sisal, here, in Kenya, by a British company employing hundreds of Kenyans?

Or I'd talk about Peter Ndegwa, who went from East Africa Breweries in Kenya to run Diageo's Nigeria business, and was last year promoted to head the company's European operations based in Amsterdam – the first African to take on that role. This isn't about corporate social responsibility, but about British companies employing and developing the best Kenyan talent and taking it global.

Maybe I'd go on to wonder about the stories of the future. The Kenyan student just returned from a Chevening scholarship in the UK which has changed their outlook on the world – what will they do with that opportunity? The artist the British Council has helped gain new connections and audiences. The Kenyan entrepreneur who just got a grant from the UK's new jobs fund to expand their business.

There are thousands of stories like this. Together they tell us how the relationship between Britain and Kenya changes lives. Not just here in Kenya but in the UK as well – in the UK businesses expanding and creating new jobs thanks to their trade with Kenya; the people safer from terrorism and crime thanks to our work together; thousands of people who, like everyone who visits Kenya, take home memories that will last a lifetime. I am one of those – and I will always carry Kenya in my heart.

This is my fourth Queen's Birthday Party in Nairobi and sadly my last. It has been the greatest privilege to represent my country in Kenya and to lead the amazing team at the British High Commission. It is easy to talk this country down, to point out what is wrong with it, what needs to change.

Every time I go on Twitter talking about a new project or a new investment, I see that questioning, sometimes cynicism. Won't the money be stolen? Won't the land be grabbed? Won't the politicians stifle the thing at birth as they all try to take their cut?

That can be grating. But I hope it doesn't go away. It is a blessing to live in a country where you can question, and debate, and doubt. It keeps us honest.

So I hope the questioning and challenge continues, but that it also gives support to those working on Kenya's biggest challenges. What President Kenyatta is doing on corruption is the single most important thing for the future success of this country. Until the day I leave, I will keep working with my team to support investigations, trace stolen money, and bring the corrupt to book. It is time some big thieves went to jail.

So yes, it's important to be clear on what needs to change.

But that is not my over-riding feeling as I prepare to leave Kenya. Instead what stays with me is the commitment of so many Kenyans to making this a better country.

The religious, business and civil society leaders who worked tirelessly through the protests and menaces of 2016 and 2017 as political competition threatened to tear Kenya apart – and whose hard work was rewarded in the handshake of a year ago.

The public servants who strive every day to make their country, their county or their village a better place. People from Kenya's poorest communities giving up their spare time to inspire kids through sport, to tackle taboos like domestic violence or menstrual stigma.

And the sheer commitment of Kenyans to entrepreneurship, education, strong values – the foundations for this country's success.

Let me thank the sponsors who have made tonight's event possible:

- East Africa Breweries
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- and Tullow Oil.

And let me thank all of you. Because tonight is about saying thank you, and through you to thousands more of our friends, colleagues and partners who help write every day the stories of success that come from the UK's partnership with Kenya.

May God bless you all, and may God bless this great country of Kenya.