

Speech: Speech at the Queen's Birthday Party 2018 in Guatemala

(Check against delivery)

Welcome and thanks for joining us today at our very special party. This is the third time I have had the honour to be one of the hosts of the Queen's Birthday Party here in Guatemala – but the first time I have had a speaking part! For those who do not know –or didn't read their invitation very carefully – and are wondering why Tom is being uncharacteristically silent, Tom and I swapped roles in November last year when I was appointed ambassador to Guatemala and he to Honduras. It is a great privilege for me to be British ambassador in a country I had already got to know and love during our first two years here. I feel very honoured.

Apart from the name and gender of the British Ambassador, nothing else has changed. My objectives, values and ambitions for UK-Guatemala relations are exactly the same as Tom's and reflect very clearly the policies of the British Government.

We still have the European Union flag here by the stage because we are still active and committed members of the European Union. And I want to thank all our partners and allies in Europe and in other countries for their strong support one week after the Salisbury attack.

This year our Queen's Birthday Party falls in the middle of our Fifteen Days of the UK, a festival of British activity across a whole range of areas, demonstrating very clearly the wide range of UK-Guatemalan engagement: on Monday the British ship RFA Mounts Bay visited Puerto Barrios and shared experience with Guatemalan counterparts of its role providing humanitarian assistance in the Caribbean after the dreadful destruction of last year's hurricanes; earlier this week we had various workshops with two experts from HM Treasury to talk about British experience and expertise in infrastructure development and public private partnerships; next week three judges from the UK will be here to discuss the importance of judicial independence and provide training to judges on how to manage complex cases. As part of an ongoing project we have with the British Museum and Google Arts and Culture, that connects Mayan ruins discovered in the 19th Century with the latest technology, we have a special kit in Guatemala to virtually demonstrate these wonders and I invite you to pass by our stand and check them out. On Saturday we will be formally marking the end of a project we have supported for the last two years working with girls' clubs in Guatemala City and Mixco to encourage girls to stay in education and be ambitious for themselves and their future.

Girls' education – and the need for every girl, as well as boy, to have 12 years of quality education – is a key priority of the British Government. We recognise that if you change the lives of girls, you transform societies. A British NGO working here, supporting education, Phoenix Projects, has seen a

real reduction in the numbers enrolling for its primary school because more girls are now staying on at secondary school and then going on to get jobs after that, destroying the vicious circle of young pregnancies. Girls' education and greater political participation are key not only to development, but also to peace and security.

As for political participation, you may have noticed that some of the ladies here are dressed as if they were going to an event 100 years ago, and there is a very good reason for that. This year the UK is celebrating the centenary of (some) women obtaining the right to vote and acknowledging the important role played by the suffragette campaigners in changing the law. I have to admit to a particular affinity to the suffragettes: they were headed by a formidable lady from Manchester, Emmeline Pankhurst, and her daughters went to the same school as I did (although not, despite what my children think, at the same time!). The Pankhursts were great believers in the power of education.

Some of the statements made against them at the time of their campaign appear to us now quite absurd, for example: If women become involved in politics, they will stop marrying, stop having children, and the human race will die out. As the ambassador of a country with a female head of state and a female prime minister, I am delighted that such views no longer prevail, that times have changed.

Often people talk about the importance of traditional values, without being very clear what is meant. Some traditional values – a woman's place is in the home – are not ones I or my country espouse. So let's be clear about the values we do espouse, the UK promotes the universal human values of integrity, respect for human rights, good government, gender equality and rule of law. And we are proud to work with Guatemala in these areas.

We are also proud to have worked with Guatemala in its fight against corruption, a fight which has assured Guatemala a global reputation for better governance and for tackling problems which blight many countries. Our support for the Public Prosecutor's Office and CICIG is assured and we trust that the election of the next Public Prosecutor, as well as the other important positions such as Head of the Tax Office, and Comptroller General, will enable Guatemala to continue on the same path of fighting and preventing corruption. Corruption and a weak rule of law frighten away investors and as British ambassador I am keen to see many more British companies in Guatemala. This is why I am very pleased that our British Chamber of Commerce is already registered and will start operations in two months and will be a great vehicle to support more British Companies investing in Guatemala.

We already have several British companies and brands here in Guatemala and I wish to thank them and others for their generous sponsorship of our event today, especially, Jaguar Energy, Transequipos, Cementos Progresos, CSC Group, Yantarni, Cerveceria Centroamericana and Twinings. I also want to thank the British Embassy staff who have worked hard to make this party a great success.

I am also delighted to see many members of our Chevening Alumni Association

here today – Guatemalans who have received full scholarships from the British Government to study a Masters degree at some of the best universities in the world. Britain has worked hard to achieve its reputation for excellence in academia and research, but we have also been fortunate to have many distinguished British scientists. Yesterday we said goodbye to one of the greatest modern scientists Sir Stephen Hawking, a physicist who was not constrained by his physical condition, who looked to the stars and inspired us all to do the same. If ever there were a man who showed what a human being is capable of, it was Stephen Hawking. He will be much missed.

I have spoken a lot already about women's suffrage, but we are actually here today to mark the birthday of the one woman in the UK who does not have the vote – Her Majesty the Queen. This year the Queen will be 92 years old and last month marked the 66th anniversary of her accession to the throne. Despite her advancing years she will be hosting next month in London a summit of 52 heads of Government from the Commonwealth. She remains very active and much admired around the world. Her birthday is very definitely a cause for celebration, and I would like to ask you all to join me in a toast to Her Majesty the Queen.