

Speech: The Ambassador's speech at the Queen's Birthday Party in Argentina

Good evening to you all. It is a pleasure to welcome so many representatives of the political, social, economic and cultural life of Argentina to the Residence. Your presence is a true reflection of the extensive links that the British Embassy has developed in Argentina.

Several of you have heard me say that no other country in the whole of Latin America can claim to have had through the years a more intense all-round relationship with the UK than Argentina. We can speak of railways, football, immigration, the British Hospital, music, trade, academic exchanges, tourism and great number of other areas in which Argentine and British people have much to share. We are two proud, independent countries with two warm, important peoples.

A good example of this relationship is this building where we are celebrating The Queen's birthday tonight, the Madero-Unzué Palace. It is a unique piece of architecture intertwining styles and stories of Argentine and British citizens. This year marks the 100th anniversary of its construction by British architects Bassett-Smith and Collcutt, and we are pleased to have here with us today the descendants of the family that lived in this Residence before it was purchased by the UK Government in 1947. Members of the Royal Family, including Prince Charles and Diana, and top artists like the Rolling Stones or Coldplay have all been here, and the place was even declared a heritage listed building by the Argentine Government.

Some people have told me that the Embassy has been a little quiet over the past few years, but what I can tell you for certain is that we are going to get out there and engage with Argentina. There is much work to do. We are coming back. Britain is back.

This rich bilateral relationship has gained great momentum in the past year, as reflected in the joint statement that both Governments signed last September, the ministerial-level visits, the visits to the UK by multi-party groups of deputies and senators, and the creation of parliamentary friendship groups. I am very grateful for the presence of deputies and senators here tonight. As I said before, this Embassy is constantly looking to open new channels and build new bridges with this country's Government and society. This is a combined effort between our Embassy and my colleague and friend Carlos Sersale, Argentine Ambassador in London.

We are pleased to see that these efforts have not remained mere wishes and that we are able to show concrete results, including joint scientific research agreements, anti-corruption co-operation projects and UK Export Finance's decision to grant a package of up to £1,000 to finance trade with Argentina, to mention only a few. At the same time, we see more and more opportunities to build bridges between our peoples, for instance through an increased number of Chevening scholars, exchange opportunities in sports like

rugby and football – we are going to have the England rugby team here at the Embassy in June – or the launch of new low-cost flights between Buenos Aires and London, because, in my view, the important thing in relations between countries is not just the relationship between the two Governments but also people-to-people links.

At a time when uncertainty reigns in many parts of the world, it is important that each country should play its part, open up to the world and not shut themselves off, aiming for fair, inclusive development. We are very pleased that Argentina is playing a leading role in the international community and getting ready in the coming months to host a WLO conference, the WTO ministerial meeting and hold the presidency of the G-20 and other international forums.

We are going to work shoulder to shoulder with our colleagues in Argentina, looking for opportunities to build a fairer, more inclusive world.

Although we are focused on the future, we will not ignore the past. 2017 marks 35 years of a very painful event for our peoples. It is important to take into account and show proper respect for all those affected by the conflict, not only veterans and their families but also, in particular, the people for whom the Islands are their home.

We wish to pay proper tribute to the fallen, in a true spirit of reconciliation. It is worth highlighting the progress made in the process of identification of Argentine soldiers buried in Darwin Cemetery, with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross, under an agreement signed by our Governments.

I am particularly grateful for the presence at this event of authorities from the Commission of Families of the Fallen and representatives of South Atlantic conflict veterans' organisations.

In the same spirit of reconciliation we will, in a few minutes, hear the Royal Marines Band play the Argentine and British national anthems. The Band members have come specially from the UK to take part in this event, an initiative for which I thank Captain Andy Hancock, who is about to finish his tour of duty as the Embassy's Defence Attaché.

I would also like to give very special thanks to all the sponsors who have made this celebration possible. You will see our sponsors here tonight, their support is very important to us. And I would also like to thank all members of the Residence and Embassy team who have worked very hard over the past few months to make sure that you enjoy the event tonight.

This is a very important day to us. It is the day when we celebrate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's birthday. It represents our National Day and it is also an opportunity to pay tribute to an exemplary Head of State.

Lately, several people have spoken to me about the story of Queen Elizabeth's reign and I have concluded that everyone has watched The Crown. The TV series is not bad, but let me tell you that I had the opportunity to meet the Queen

on three occasions and my admiration for her has grown over the years. The monarchy has had the ability to change in order to identify itself with the society it represents. Through her example, the Queen has shown an interest and a sense of devotion and service that very few can match. She has now reigned for over 65 years and continues to work for her country, day after day.

So I am now going to invite you to make a toast to the Heads of State and the peoples of our two countries. I personally have chosen to toast the Argentine President with a glass of Malbec and the Queen with a genuine single malt Scotch. I trust you will understand that this is one of the sacrifices that diplomats sometimes have to make.

Thank you for your patience. I was not going to speak, but my colleagues said that I was going to have a captive audience, and so you have been. Thank you all for coming. Enjoy the party!