

Speech: The British High Commissioner's Queen's Birthday Party Speech

Your Excellency Minister for Commonwealth, your excellencies ministers here present, senior members of government, traditional leaders, members of the diplomatic corps, esteemed members of the private sector, ladies and gentlemen – a very warm welcome to the Queen's 91st Birthday Party. My thanks to the children of the Arbore Music school whose singing and playing we have just heard and will hear more of this evening. I also wish to acknowledge the staff of the British High Commission who have worked so hard in difficult circumstances to organize this evening's event.

Yes Her Majesty the Queen is now 91 years old and is looking forward in particular to the next Commonwealth Summit which will be in London next year on 16 April.

You may not know that Her Majesty is now the longest reigning monarch in British History. The Queen has received some extraordinary gifts from around the world including, in 1972 a seven-year-old bull elephant called Jumbo presented by, yes you have guessed it, the then President of Cameroon, to mark her Silver Wedding Anniversary.

Vous avez de la chance, ce soir, parce que notre Premier ministre, Theresa May, a annoncé une élection générale au Royaume-Uni pour le 8 juin et en vertu de notre loi électorale britannique, car il ne reste que moins de 6 semaines, je ne suis pas autorisé à commenter sur la politique du gouvernement britannique ou prononcer sur ce que le Royaume-Uni va faire, ou pas, au cours de l'année prochaine. Ça c'est pour notre nouveau gouvernement, quel qu'il soit, de décider après l'élection.

So – I can see you smiling – there are two consequences for my speech this evening:

- It will be short
- You will be spared any self-righteous descriptions of policy, or how much money the United Kingdom is spending on humanitarian support, or in helping Cameroon and other countries in the region fight terrorism, to stand up for human rights, to offer scholarships to help Cameroonians and others to study both in Cameroon and in the United Kingdom

I can however suggest you read the helpful booklet that has been produced with the help of our sponsors that describes all of this and more. Please take a copy on leaving this evening.

Alors, qu'est-ce que cela me laisse à dire ? Je voudrais focaliser sur l'avenir du Cameroun. Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec le Premier ministre de Cameroon lorsqu'il a annoncé à Londres lors de la dernière mission commerciale Anglo – Camerounaise, que la prospérité du Cameroun dépend en

grande partie, du secteur privé. Ce soir, notre sponsor Platinum est Diageo, connu de beaucoup d'entre vous en tant que brasseurs de 'Guinness'. Nos remerciements à Diageo, pour l'excellente sélection de whisky écossais et de la bière servis ce soir.

Le jardin est éclairé ce soir grâce à l'électricité fournie par Eneo dont l'actionnaire majoritaire est le groupe d'investissement britannique Actis.

And I have a special announcement regarding English wine, yes really it does exist and it is here tonight. The wine is a fresh, sparkling wine from the Denbies vineyard in Surrey which is available for tasting. The wine tasting has been provided by the British Water company Biwater who are in the final stages of agreeing the construction of new water supplies in 13 towns around Cameroon. I could make a terrible joke about 'water to wine' but it is probably better to pass on this.

And in case you would like to connect your mobile phone to the internet you can do so thanks to Vodaphone who are providing a free 4G wifi zone in the garden for all guests this evening. Vodaphone arrived in Cameroon last year and we wish them well as one of the world's most advanced telecommunications companies.

Nous sommes également reconnaissants aux autres entreprises britanniques qui ont parrainé cette soiree:

Joule Afrique (les barrages hydroélectrique et energie solaire); De La Rue qui fournit déjà des passeports camerounais et des timbres fiscaux pour les vins et autres boissons, New Age qui a deja investis plusieurs milliards de livres dans le développement de forages de gaz naturel et qui souhaite construire une usine de gaz naturel liquide au Cameroun, Aggreko qui fournit des solutions de production d'électricité et Standard Chartered Bank qui joue un rôle essentiel dans le financement d'un large éventail de projets et d'entreprises au Cameroun.

I underline the strength of British engagement in the private sector in Cameroon because the future strength of the economy of Cameroon depends on a successful private sector. Profit and taxes are not dirty words. They are essential for creating jobs, generating wealth, providing hope and inspiration for millions of young people. That is why I am pleased this evening to focus on the private sector and to thank the Chief Executives present this evening for their support, and to wish them, and Cameroon a very successful coming year. Finally I look forward to the bilateral relationship between Cameroon and the United Kingdom going from strength to strength in the coming year. We are already partners – we look to redoubling our efforts to make the partnership even more productive in the coming months.

But we must not forget whose birthday party this is. I ask you now to raise your glasses to toast – the Queen.