Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Britain and South Africa: a 21st century partnership

2012-02-14

“It is a great pleasure to be here and thank you for welcoming me to your university on my first visit to South Africa as British Foreign Secretary. It has been an excellent visit: I have met your Foreign Minister, Premier Zille and members of the business community; I visited Hanover Park Township School and it was a meeting with your President this morning which has made me rather late for you - so please accept my apologies for that.

My visit has fired me with enthusiasm for your fantastic city and region. The Western Cape has furnished the world with a whole series of sporting, literary and scientific icons; from former England cricket player Basil D’Oliviera to pioneer heart surgeon Christiaan Barnard and Nobel Prize Winning author JM Coetzee. Your University itself has produced inspiring anti-apartheid figures such as Kadar Asmal, whose passing last year was a loss for all of us, and Jakes Gerwel, who did so much to make this university a vehicle for change in South Africa. I am so glad that Louse Asmal could join us today, and I have no doubt that many of the students here will also go on to do great things in the future.

There are two reasons why I wanted to give my first speech in South Africa here at UWC.

This first is because I want to encourage you all to see Britain as a warm friend and close partner for the 21st century: one of the very best countries in the world to visit, to study in, and with which to do business. Today in Britain we are looking at our relationship with South Africa with fresh eyes and we are investing in that relationship too, and we hope you will do the same.

The second reason I am here is to talk about the foreign policy of the future. You represent your country’s next generation of leaders. You belong to a South Africa that is a growing force in world affairs, and that is shaping a new global role for itself. How South Africa exercises that role in the future will have a major impact not just on your region but on our world. We want to build a better and stronger partnership in foreign policy to match our close ties in other areas, and to rise to the challenges of the 21st century.

Some of you may think South Africa’s relations with Britain are something of the past. Our ties do go back a long way. It was here in Cape Town that Britain’s relationship with South Africa began, in 1795. It was also here that a Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, gave his famous ‘Winds of change’ speech in 1960. We do have a lot of history between us - not all of it easy, and in the past not all of it good.

But in the words of one American author, “all experience is an arch to build on”. Our relationship today is transformed. It is a deep and broad one between nations that are equals, strengthened at every level by bonds between our citizens, and in every respect a partnership for the 21st century.

As South Africa continues its development journey and builds new relationships around the world, we believe Britain has much to offer to it.

Our countries share fundamental values as members of the world’s community of fellow democracies.

We are both members of the Commonwealth and have leading international roles. From global economic governance to peacekeeping we are nations that help to shoulder international burdens, and in 2012 we are doing so side by side as fellow members of the UN Security Council. Your stewardship of the Durban climate change conference is just one recent example of what South African diplomacy can accomplish.

We support, as South African does, a stronger African voice in world affairs, including a greater role for the African Union and a reformed UN Security Council with permanent African representation.

As the only country that is set to meet its G7 target of 0.7% of GNI spend on aid by 2013, we are also a reliable partner in development. Here in South Africa we support programmes to improve maternal health and address violence against women and girls, and from famine in the Horn of Africa to stabilisation in South Sudan British aid helps address problems that would otherwise hold back those regions.

And we are both trading nations with open economies, occupying complementary geo-strategic positions: in Britain we are a gateway to continental Europe and the EU Single Market; and we see South Africa as a gateway to the rest of Africa.

Our bilateral trade is a force for good in both our countries. Today, Britain exports more in goods and services to South Africa than we do to Brazil, Turkey or Korea. These exports grew by 26% last year, and more than a quarter of all out exports to Africa come here.

In turn, we are your largest single foreign investor. 54% of all FDI in South Africa today comes from Britain or from companies based in Britain - with a net book value of over £10.5 billion - and we are your fifth largest trading partner in the world.

As your government works to support small and medium sized businesses and create more jobs, our UK/South Africa Entrepreneurs Programme is helping companies in both our countries to do business.

I’m proud that it is a British bus manufacturer based in Yorkshire - the county that I come from - that recently won the contract to provide Cape Town with its new fleet of buses, and that the Middlesbrough-based company ‘i-snapshot’ recently recorded a five-fold increase in revenue from sales of its software here in South Africa.

For all these reasons eight months ago we signed a Joint Strategy for a modern partnership between South Africa and Britain, with ambitious goals covering sustainable development, security, governance and society. It includes the target our doubling our bilateral trade by 2015, which would be good news for both our economies. Your Foreign Minister and I reviewed progress against it yesterday, and reaffirmed our commitment to it.

Our focus on South Africa is part of a wider effort to reinvigorate Britain’s relationships with old partners and new friends around the world beyond Europe and North America. We are doing this in Latin America and in Asia, opening new Embassies and consulates for the first time in decades, and increasing our diplomatic staff in twenty two countries.

In South Africa’s case, there is a double imperative for this effort. You are an emerging power and an old friend. For those of you who are football fans, and as our High Commissioner is fond of saying, this is a Premier League relationship for us and we want to keep it that way in the future.

We know that Africa is a continent of great dynamism and potential that for too long has been seen through the prism of conflict and need, when it should be recognised for its many success stories and its enormous social and economic potential. Tomorrow for example I will visit Botswana - a beacon of peace and stability in the region, which astonishingly no British Foreign Secretary has visited for 26 years.

South Africa, with all its extraordinary achievements, has been a leading force in propelling Africa onto the world stage. As we host the Olympics and Paralympics this year, we are often reminded of the great success that South Africa made of the World Cup in 2010.

You are Africa’s largest economy as well as being the only African member of the G20, and a member of dynamic new economic groupings including IBSA and the BRICS. With this growing economic clout rightly comes a growing voice in international affairs - and this is the second area where we think Britain and South Africa should be natural partners.

When I was a student the Western world was still in the grip of the Cold War and relations between the world’s powers are the same - how to prevent nuclear proliferation and expand human rights for example - but the context is utterly different.

Our world is not coalescing into rigid power blocs as appeared to be the case when Macmillan gave his speech in 1960. We live in a networked world of multiple centres of decision-making; a world where economic power and influence is shifting away from the

developed countries of the West to the emerging economies and new powerhouses of the South and East; and an age of the greater empowerment of citizens in relation to governments as we are seeing across the Middle East today.

In Britain we think that this change is positive - opening up new opportunities for innovation, trade and global growth and breathing new life into international institutions. It is right that more countries have a say in how international decisions are made, and it is right that South Africa is among the nations at the top table.

But at the same time these changes pose challenges that we need to overcome.

One of these is a difference of opinion over how we protect human rights in other countries. This is not an abstract matter. Two weeks ago people died in Syria while the UN Security Council failed to agree a united response - and many more are still dying today.

We welcome the principled stance that South Africa took in voting as we did for the UNSC resolution, and I welcome the discussions that I have had with your Foreign Minister yesterday about intensifying peaceful diplomatic pressure and supporting the regional leadership shown by the Arab League.

Britain and South Africa agree about the outcome that we want to see, and that is for Syrians to be allowed to resolve their differences peacefully. What currently stands between them and this legitimate aspiration is the Assad regime’s naked determination to cling to power at any cost. That is why we are determined to use every peaceful means to intensify the diplomatic and economic stranglehold on the regime. On top of the new Friends of Syria group, new EU sanctions and a new effort to seek UN backing for the Arab League plan, I have announced that Britain will help NGOs and Syrian activists to document and record evidence of the crimes taking place, to support future efforts to gain justice for the Syrian people.

But Britain and South Africa do not always agree on everything in foreign policy, as our governments disagreed over aspects of the international intervention in Libya.

Let me be absolutely clear where Britain stands on the changes in the Middle East today.

We regard each country in the region as different. Some countries in the region are taking important and peaceful steps towards greater political and economic freedom; from Algeria to Morocco and Jordan. We respect and support their right to do so in their own way.

But we must stand up for fundamental human rights and speak our when these are abused, and when mass murder is threatened or being committed we cannot stand by. The idea of not intervening at all in the affairs of other countries should not be maintained when thousands of lives are being lost. And no country can invoke national sovereignty as a licence to trample on every tenet of international law and every principle of human dignity.

South Africa knows a great deal more than most countries about the struggle for democracy. This is a struggle not just about throwing off oppression but about building a just and peaceful society.

As a people you transformed Africa's most repressive regime into a genuine, inclusive democracy, and you did it yourselves. I know this university played a distinguished role in that struggle.

You succeeded in dismantling, through negotiations and reconciliation, a historic injustice. In the space of eighteen years you have built your democracy and your economy and opened it to the word, enabling you to redress the evils of apartheid.

These achievements are particularly present to us all in the year of the centenary of the ANC.

More than many nations you understand the need for societies to be inclusive and to embrace diversity while according equal rights. Your whole country stands as a towering example of the triumph of peaceful activism over repression. The moving preamble to your Constitution honours those "who suffered for justice and freedom" in South Africa, and you have a unique role to play in supporting those things in other countries.

So you should not be surprised when others look to you and ask you to lend your moral strength and international standing to help protect human rights in other countries, or hold you to your ideals in domestic debates, including that recently on media freedom.

What we wish for the people of Syria is what both our countries desire for the people of Zimbabwe - the right to choose their own government freely and openly and to enjoy peaceful and prosperous lives, and we support South Africa's efforts and leadership in that regard.

It is also what we are trying to help the people of Somalia achieve, to overcome the appalling legacy of violence and suffering - and I am delighted that your Foreign Minister will attend the London Conference on Somalia next week where we will try to make progress towards that goal.

So I am convinced that there is a strong basis for closer understanding and deeper trust between our countries over time. That is what we should aspire to as the foundation of our relations in the twenty first century. Our shared values, our prosperity and our security are best served when we can speak with one voice on foreign policy. Sometimes we will react differently to the challenges facing us, but that is nothing to be feared. There is much more that brings our countries close together than that which can sometimes pull us apart.

So as I come to the end of my visit to South Africa, I am optimistic that we will be able to look back on the start of this decade as the time when we began to build a deeper understanding and closer ties between us; so that in years to come Britain and South Africa not only help

each other to create the jobs and growth that give opportunity to our young people, but we also work together to an even greater degree to support international peace and security. That would be good for both our countries - and I feel sure that it would be good for the world as well.

Thank you very much indeed.”

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-and-south-africa-a-21st-century-partnership