



British
High Commission
Pretoria

Africa in the 21st Century: the view from London

**Delivered by Dame Nicola Brewer, British High Commissioner to South Africa
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National Director

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

When Elizabeth reminded me I'd promised to do this speech and owed her a title, I tried for about 5 minutes to come up with an arresting one. But, trust me, I'm a diplomat (as doctors and lawyers used to say), snappy titles can come back to bite you. And I hadn't written the speech yet. So I played safe.

As a linguist by training, when I'm asked what Ambassadors or High Commissioners do all day, I say our job is a bit like being a two-way interpreter. We interpret our own country to the one we have the privilege of living in - it is a huge privilege to live in such a beautiful and fascinating country as South Africa. And we try to interpret the country we are living in for the one we have the privilege of representing. A good interpreter can bring countries, and their peoples, closer. Sometimes they do it in public, like tonight. Sometimes they do it in private. A former High Commissioner to another Commonwealth country once told me that his rule was to be frank in private and respectful in public. So that's how I look at my job. And because South Africa and my teenage son have between them taught me the power of football, I describe my aim during my time here as being to keep the relationship between the UK and SA in the Premier League.

I have three main messages this evening. That views of Africa are converging, upwards; that the UK and SA share ideals which shape our foreign and our domestic policies, which we've both got to live up to; and that converging views and shared ideals don't mean that we agree on everything but do mean that we should listen to each other.

There was a lot of intent listening, and interesting talking, between the 10 British and South African ministers in London 10 days ago for our biannual bilateral forum. Just as all babies are beautiful, all Ministerial meetings are successful. As the proud co-parent of a brand-new, short and practical UK SA strategy, it was great to see that signed off by smiling Ministers at the forum. It was held in the "right atmosphere". It underlined our "shared values". And it "elevated" our relationship. Those were all quotes from SA participants, not my reporting telegram. (Freedom of Information applicants please note: I didn't send one.)

When I was at university too many decades ago to mention, one of my set texts was *Religio Medici* by Sir Thomas Browne who lived from 1605 to 1684. In it he wrote, "We carry with us the wonders we seek without us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us". But that hasn't always been the prevailing view of Africa on my continent. European history books, written by European men for other European men, wrote Africa off as 'the dark continent'. According to an authoritative source – Wikipedia, so it may be right! - our mapmakers knew nothing of the continent's interior geography. So they left it 'dark'. Scroll on to 1985 and the Live Aid concerts, even then Africa was painted as full of problems – conflict, famine and under-development. And in May 2000, this is how *The Economist* saw Africa.

But the picture is much more upbeat today. Scientists now believe that all modern humans can trace their ancestry back to one African woman whom they have unromantically dubbed mitochondrial Eve. There's huge excitement in the UK scientific community about the hominid fossils found recently in the Cradle of Humankind. Sir Thomas got it right: 'We're all a bit African' is a powerful and uplifting genetic story. Turning back to the dismal science, *The Economist* calculates that, over the ten years to 2010, six of the world's ten fastest-growing economies

were in sub-Saharan Africa. An IMF forecast is that Africa will take seven of the top ten places over the next five years.

The McKinsey report, 'Lions on the Move: The progress and potential of African Economies', grabbed a lot of attention, in boardrooms and beyond. Its positive story can be summarised in two pages of its statistics - let me give you a minute to remind yourselves of them. This is good news for Africa, and good news for South Africa, as the gateway to the rest of the continent. But both sides of the gateway need to look attractive. If the grass looks greener on one side – and in 2010, growth in Nigeria was 5.6 percentage points higher than South Africa's, and Ghana's was 2.9 percentage points higher – then firms and foreign investors may decide to take the direct route. Investor confidence can be a fragile thing, unnerved by words - what one recent editorial in a SA newspaper called "reckless radicalism" – as well as more tangible economic evidence.

The UK government gets the Lions message. The view from London is that Africa is a partner, not a problem. It's a continent of 54 – about to be 55 - countries full of potential and opportunities for mutual benefit. That was the context for our Bilateral Forum earlier this month. William Hague made a point of saying, privately to Maite Nkoana Mashabane and then publicly to the media, that Britain's coalition government came to power determined to develop bilateral relationships with old friends and new powers of the South and East – and that South Africa falls firmly into both categories.

That new paradigm doesn't reduce Britain's commitment to its development partners. Andrew Mitchell, our Secretary of State for International Development, who will be paying his second visit as Minister to South Africa this week, has just announced a further £76 million [about 800 million Rand] contribution to our partnership with South Africa over the next four years. Britain is the only G8 country on course to meet the target, set at Gleneagles in 2005, of ODA worth 0.7% of GNI by 2013. And we're going to make it 2 years ahead of the Gleneagles deadline. Not just because it is the moral thing to do, though it is. But also, as David Cameron said just before the Global Alliance for Vaccines conference the weekend before last, because it is in our national interest. He said,

If we invest in countries before they become broken, we might not end up spending so much on the problems that result. By helping countries develop economically and politically, we reduce the pressures that lead to instability, and build new markets for trade and growth.

We want to do that jointly with South Africa, and the new SADPA. In my time in Britain's DFID, I witnessed some of the pent-up potential on this continent. I have vivid memories of a visit in 2002 to Kibera, the second largest urban slum in Africa, just outside Nairobi. The conditions were squalid. But I met lots of immensely resourceful people, looking for any opportunity to build a better future for themselves and their families. I remember Clare Short telling me sharply that people living in poverty should be admired for their resilience and resourcefulness, not pitied. She also taught me that the best single developmental intervention a country could make was to educate its girl children. Once a country has got the quantity of education its people need, the next mountain to climb, for the UK as for SA, is to maintain or improve the quality of education for all its learners.

That UK/SA strategy I talked about was co-designed to be responsive to the shared vision of a democratic and prosperous future. Minister Mashabane spoke at SAIIA a little over a year ago about Africa's potential. She called for urgent interventions in four areas – what she called the four capital I s: Infrastructure, Intra-trade, Industry and Integration. Taking that lead, these are exactly the things DFID's, and other parts of the British Government's, efforts are focussed on. We see huge potential in the African Free Trade Initiative to boost growth and reduce poverty. British development Minister, Stephen O'Brien, was the only Minister from outside the region to participate in the Trilateral meeting of regional economic organisations in Johannesburg just over a week ago. The European Union shows what regional free trade can do for countries – and don't forget that South Africa's trade with the EU is more than twice as big as with China. I don't want to exaggerate the parallel but just imagine the potential for your region.

Regional integration will help lower costs through the development of international supply chains, economies of scale, and by creating a larger market. That would

provide a platform for the development of products that are more likely to succeed in the global market. The concrete results are already being seen at the Chirundu bordercrossing - a major border along the North South transport corridor between Zimbabwe and Zambia. Waiting times for commercial traffic have been reduced from 4 - 5 days to a maximum of two days, and often to a few hours. From holiday jobs I did in Yorkshire when I was a student, I thought it was Yorkshire businessmen who see time as money – but apparently the ancient Greeks did too. So do African entrepreneurs today.

The UK is keen to support Africa's integration into the world economy: it's good for you and it's good for us. It's central to the UK Government's policy of driving growth and poverty reduction. We also need to understand what the global transition to a carbon constrained future means for all our economies. What did Bobby Godsell say when he was at Eskom: SA's got the cheapest electricity in the world but we're all out of stock? There IS a green revolution taking place – and Africa can be at the forefront, creating new, sustainable green jobs, supported by both direct investment and international support. I know British firms are keen to support renewable energy development, and my Government is considering significant support to South Africa's Renewables Initiative.

Minister Mashabane referred last week to the elevation of our partnership to a new level, based on our shared values. It set me wondering how many we do share. Ten is a nice round number. And here's a starter for 10 which senior strategists in one of our two countries drew up very recently. No prizes for guessing who. South Africa's National Planning Commission, presented to Parliament the week before last. Unlike SA, the UK hasn't been a country that tends to write things down – constitutions, values, whatever. But we're starting to think about it. And we recognise these values. We also know when our government is applying them, at home and abroad.

I'm not pretending there are no differences between the UK and SA. There are many. The ideals and values we now share have come from sometimes overlapping, sometimes clashing histories. This gives us different perspectives and different emphases. Some might say we have a 'northern' preference for action,

now. Others might say you show a preference for strategic patience, dialogue and consensus. But what we have in common is more important than our differences. As our ministers agreed in London, if our people and your people enjoy democracy, human rights like free speech, the rule of law, we should respond when other people demand them too.

What we saw in London was a commitment to give ourselves the time to listen, to better understand each other's perspectives and to talk through alternative plans of action. That approach helps us feel our way to common ground on Libya, Syria and in our response to the 'Arab spring' more broadly. We won't always get there at the same time. I don't think we did on Ivory Coast for example, when former President Gbagbo tried to steal the elections at the end of last year.

There's no shortage of current crises to test our commitment to do better. Tension is rising again in Southern Sudan as 9 July gets closer. That's just one of the places where South Africa and former President Thabo Mbeki, at the request of the African Union, have special parts to play. The UK is urging both the North and South to find a peaceful and durable solution for violence in Abyei and South Kordofan, and to come to an agreement on outstanding areas of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The UK and SA share a common vision of the importance of the AU in resolving conflicts, current and potential, across this continent. One of the things we talked about in London last week was how we can support African solutions to African problems.

That UK/SA strategy I've been talking about commits us both to work together at the national, bilateral level, regionally, continentally, and globally. South Africa and the UK are current members of most of the fora in which global problems get discussed – the UN Security Council, the Commonwealth, the G20, the UNFCCC. Take possibly the most difficult legacy of the last 60 years – the conflict in the Middle East. In their private discussions, Minister Mashabane and Foreign Secretary Hague talked about the impact that the absence of an active peace process has on a whole range of other issues. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be trying resolve other issues. But it does mean we mustn't ignore the Middle Eastern elephant in the room. And the UK doesn't. We want to see a stable, prosperous Middle East with a

sovereign and viable Palestinian State living in peace alongside a secure Israel at the heart of it.

We both agree the UN Security Council needs to be reformed. It has to be more representative of the modern world, and still able to make the necessary decisions, and take the necessary action, to maintain international peace and security. The UK wants to see permanent African representation on the Council and we believe it is very much for Africa to decide what that is. But all countries will need to be flexible to achieve reform. The UK was certainly delighted to see South Africa re-elected for a second non permanent stint on the Security Council. I hope that *ke nako* applies and that this is Africa's time to show a lead.

Shared values also come into play in a complicated way when there's trouble in the near neighbourhood. The most personal example of that for me was Northern Ireland, where I grew up during what was euphemistically called The Troubles. The international community does tend to look first to capitals or neighbouring powers to sort out local or regional problems. I think the UK and South Africa would agree that's right where it's feasible. So we do look to South Africa to take the lead when there are demands for reform in Zimbabwe or Swaziland. History, and global responsibility, as well as shared values mean we know we have a stake in resolution of problems in those countries too. The right way to exercise that responsibility seems to us to support South Africa's patient efforts.

Shared values can give useful guidance in tackling modern global challenges too. Take climate change, on which South Africa's position is progressive, like the UK's. South Africa reconfirmed President Zuma's bold mitigation offer at the Cancun meeting, at the end of last year, first made at Copenhagen the year before. SA now assumes the Chairmanship of the UNFCCC talks and hosts the Conference of the Parties in Durban at the end of November. An awful lot is riding on this event; the UK and South Africa share the high end goal of a global, legally binding, ambitious agreement. A number of highly sensitive issues will have to be resolved at or before Durban to keep us on course for this. Both our Foreign and Environment Secretaries underlined earlier this month in London their support for the roles Ministers Mashabane and Molewa have to play.

William Hague likes to emphasise that our international efforts are only as powerful as the example we set back home. In September last year he said that ‘an enduring strength of our democracy is our ability to shine a light on our faults and to learn from the mistakes of the past’ and went on to quote Gladstone: “Here is my first principle of foreign policy: good government at home”. That’s a challenge for every country in the world. Getting it right once isn’t enough, it’s a constant struggle. South Africa sets the gold standard – your constitution is a model of modern values. The National Planning Council’s diagnostic paper I quoted from seeks to use those values derived from the constitution to build a better Africa and a better world. It isn’t easy to balance sensitive issues like freedom of information with protection of national security. It’s especially hard to capture that in legislative form. Governments in every continent and of all stripes find this tough. I remember having to deal with the wave of freedom of information requests that hit the Foreign Office after our Freedom of Information Bill went on the statute books.

Yet freedom of expression remains a powerful human right and shared value. It drives access to information, enabling citizens to make informed choices and hold decision-makers accountable. This flow of information and ideas and the discussion it leads to is crucial if a society is to grow and flourish socially and economically. You’d expect the media to speak out about this – and they have, in very vivid ways, here in South Africa. Several political leaders have too. And so have business: the chairman of Pick n Pay recently wrote that ‘it is a progressive truism that business, the engine of prosperity, job creation and economic growth, can only flourish in a society where the flow of information is free and unfettered by undue state control’.

I am not sure there is a permanent answer. But there are some potentially worrying ones, against which the quality and openness of debate, in parliament and in the media, is the best protection. The consultative nature of SA’s legislative process, like your wonderful constitution, has been admired around the world.

Coming back to my basic thesis – the view of Africa, from London and from Pretoria, is a shared and a positive one. It is based on the aspiration for greater prosperity for both our countries in a more stable and peaceful world where the values we share

are accessible to all peoples who want them – as more and more do. The Freedom Charter got this 56 years ago when it said, ‘the people shall govern’. The UK says Amen to that.

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