

British Embassy commemorates the Queen's Birthday Party

Dear Friends,

Good morning. I am pleased to welcome you today to celebrate the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth Second. Thank you very much for being here.

My wife and I only arrived almost six months ago. Time has passed very quickly. My big challenge now is that I have met many people only once and my memory of faces is very bad. Then help me this day if I'm confused!

Although six months is a very short time, there have been many big changes since September. There is a new government in Guatemala. The United Kingdom has left the European Union. In addition, we have learned new vocabulary – for example coronavirus. However, there is also much that has not changed. And something that stays the same are the priorities of the United Kingdom and the work of the British Embassy here in Guatemala. They are three:

1. support our people and our values
2. prosperity and commercial ties
3. as well as peace and security

We have been part of different campaigns on British values. From the Beyond Plastics initiative, for the reduction of single-use plastics, through the campaign on Freedom of the Press and our support for groups that suffer human rights abuses – for example, women, LGBTI and children.

During my few months here, I have worked with the government and NGOs on these issues, on major projects in many parts of the country. For example: Sexual and reproductive health, business and human rights, poverty reduction and climate change.

I have already seen the great contribution that these organizations have made to improve the lives of Guatemalans and their programmes in different priority areas. I have had the honour of visiting places – for example, Xela or Petén – where NGOs are using creativity, energy and experience to do very important things. Things with positive impacts for the most disadvantaged communities. We have worked and will continue working with a number of NGOs here in Guatemala.

In relation to the prosperity of our peoples, we work together with Guatemala on transparency issues, sharing our experience of good practices and lessons learned. We continue to support British companies, which have businesses or investments here. Similarly, we are helping companies with interest to do new deals. During February, we saw a good example of that with the visit of a delegation of security companies.

I am very pleased to know that the Government of Guatemala ratified the Association Agreement between Central America and the United Kingdom last

year. This agreement is of great importance as it represents an opportunity to further deepen our relationship with Guatemala. Two years ago, a new British-Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce was inaugurated. This important platform will also help to increase trade and investment in both countries. I welcome its members who are with us this afternoon.

Education is a very important exchange sector between our two countries. The reputation of UK universities is recognized and their work transcends borders. For example, in Guatemala, the University of Bristol, the University of Edinburgh and the University of Liverpool have carried out close projects with INSIVUMEH to strengthen volcano-monitoring capacities in Guatemala. One of the ways in which we have further strengthened the relationship between Guatemala and the United Kingdom has been through the Chevening scholarship programme. Today I am pleased to see many members of our Chevening Fellows Association.

Perhaps you have also noticed that the Embassy is very active on social media, which we use to promote all these initiatives. Recently, as an old man, I have tried to promote my own Twitter channel. If you still do not follow me, I invite you to do it, so that you are aware of our activities, topics about the United Kingdom and a bit of my magical experiences here in Guatemala.

You might also have noticed the word "Brexit". No more than two months ago, the UK officially left the EU, after 47 years of membership. This is something we do not celebrate, nor regret, is just a step taken by our government following the wishes of the British people through a democratic process that took place in 2016. We are going to work with our European partners to secure a trade agreement this year. Despite the UK leaving the EU, we remain part of Europe. Moreover, we will always work with our colleagues here and worldwide in our values, people, prosperity and peace.

I want to take the opportunity to project a global Britain, in four parts:

1. a new relationship with our European partners and at the same time from other parts of the world, as here in Guatemala
2. negotiate new agreements in other markets and reaffirm ourselves as a free trade partner
3. act with moral anchors around the world to continue protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law
4. and continue working for peace and security around the world, in all the organizations in which we have a membership, an active voice: permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, NATO, the European Council, the G7, G20, British Commonwealth of Nations and many others

If you ask me: What plans does the UK have for 2020? We are already in communication with many of you to carry out projects and programs to continue strengthening the bilateral relationship.

In addition to the trade negotiations that we will be carrying out around the world, including with Europe, this year we will be working hard as one of the two hosts of COP 26, which is the conference of member states for Climate

Change, which will take place in Glasgow, Scotland in November. At the Embassy, we will work more on this topic during 2020, carrying out some projects. I think this is very important here in Guatemala because it is one of the countries most exposed to the challenge of climate change.

Before finishing, I would like to thank now the Guatemalan institutions that have supported the Embassy in consular cases this year, such as Proatur, Disetur and the National Civil Police. We are in uncertain times with the spread of the coronavirus, but I sleep better with the certainty that we have great support from these institutions.

I would also like to thank all the sponsoring companies that join us today. My colleague Paola has named them all. Thank you!

I would also like to thank my wife for her support and my team at the Embassy, for all the work they do and their contribution to the relations between the United Kingdom and Guatemala, as well as the realization of this event.

Finally, thank you all for coming. It is wonderful to have you here and we look forward to continuing to work together in the months and years to come.

Thank you.