

Press release: British High Commission Abuja celebrates Queen Elizabeth II at 91

The British High Commission Abuja on Wednesday, 26th April marked the 91st birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and celebrated the strong partnership between the UK and Nigeria. More than 500 guests attended the event including Nigeria's Senate President, Dr Bukola Saraki, former Nigerian Vice President, Atiku Abubakar and governors of Edo, Jigawa and Kaduna States. Other guests included federal legislators, current and former ministers, business leaders, the diplomatic corps, media and sports personalities and the local community.

In his welcome remarks British High Commissioner to Nigeria Paul Arkwright thanked guests and partners for attending this year's celebration. He said:

Today we celebrate Her Majesty's 91st Birthday. In a world which seems to be changing at a bewildering pace, I'd like to pay tribute to a remarkable woman whose devotion to duty, steadfast faith and sense of service to her people is, I would say, unparalleled – and a lesson to us all. I would also like to pay tribute to all of those, including all of you here, who are striving to make Nigeria a better place, where people are treated equally; where corruption can find no hiding place; where government, the private sector and civil society organisations work together to create jobs and promote growth. In a country where over 2 million young people enter the job market every year, the task is more important than ever – and more urgent. The UK and Her Majesty's Government are playing a key role in that effort. Nigeria is our biggest and most important post in Africa, with 7 offices in the country; with over 800 people working for the British Government.

The UK is a partner to Nigeria; partners in the UN – the recent United Nations Security Council visit to Nigeria was organised and led by the UK – partners in the Commonwealth, and partners in tackling global issues such as terrorism, climate change and illegal migration

Mr Arkwright commended the warm and welcoming nature of Nigerians. He said:

In the past 18 months there have been frustrating challenges around government, and the closure of Abuja airport. But I have also experienced the warmth and joy; the spontaneity and the kindness; the resilience and the optimism. And I share that optimism. Like it

or not, this country gets under your skin. And that's because of the people here; people who embrace strangers, people who are desperate for you to appreciate Egusi soup and Tuface; and people who present a face which can only make you smile.

Highlights of the celebration included a video display showing the work of British Council and the Premier League joining up to establish the Premier Skills programme – an innovative way to engage and develop the skills of young people in Nigeria, some thrilling ball juggling by a footballer, a slideshow of numerous UK sports stars and facilities and a beautiful rendition of the UK and Nigerian national anthem by the Abuja Holy Trinity Catholic Church choir.

The theme for this year's Queen's Birthday Party celebration in Abuja is Sport is GREAT, to reflect the UK's record as a hub for sports, and to highlight the value of sports to both the UK and Nigeria. Speaking on the theme the British High Commissioner said:

For us the Queen's birthday celebration is a moment to draw on some of the strongest things that bring our unity to the surface. The UK and Nigeria are both very passionate about sports. In both our countries sports serve not only a recreational, business or entertainment purpose; it serves as a real tool for unity and the promotion of our national identity. Sport has also strengthened the friendship between our nations. Team GB draws support from millions of Nigerians when British athletes of Nigerian origin are in the contest. The Premier League is as massive in Nigeria as it is in the UK. It's widely believed some Premier League clubs have more fans in Nigeria than they do in the UK.

The celebration also featured an exhibition of photographs by Fati Gangaran from the series 'Bits of Borno', highlighting the impact of the conflict in the north east of Nigeria on women and girls.

Wednesday's celebration was the second this year by the UK mission in Nigeria in honour of the Queen's 91st birthday. On April 20, the British Deputy High Commission in Lagos hosted a party widely attended by business leaders, government officials, music and movie stars as well as traditional leaders. The Lagos QBP celebrated British and Nigerian music where guests were treated to a special music performance by the Yinka Davies Band.