

Speech: Our tax cuts will matter to millions: article by Jane Ellison

When I was first elected to parliament in 2010, the minimum wage was £5.80, average weekly earnings were £450, and the personal allowance – the point at which people start paying income tax – stood at just £6,475.

Today marks the beginning of the seventh new tax year since then and the national living wage now stands at £7.50, average weekly earnings have topped £500 and the personal allowance has been significantly increased. As of today, you can earn £11,500 before you start to pay income tax.

Millions of people across the country will now be better off, with a typical basic rate taxpayer saving more than £1,000 in tax compared to back then.

It also means 1.3 million people won't pay income tax at all any more – but the good news isn't confined to our lowest paid.

Alongside the increase to the personal allowance, we're also raising the threshold for those who pay the 40p income tax rate. Now, only those earning £45,000 or more will pay the higher rate, stopping more than half a million on middle incomes tipping into the top rate.

The measures may not grab headlines, but they matter. The government wants people to take home more of their hard-earned money, giving them the means to live well, realise their ambitions and look after their families.

Our plan for Britain means living within our means as a country, giving the lowest earners a pay rise through the national living wage, taking 1.3 million people out of tax altogether, helping hard-working families to keep more of what they earn by cutting taxes for 31 million people and doubling free childcare for nearly 400,000 parents.

We're following a long-term plan to get our tax system working for working people – a plan that will have spanned a whole decade.

As we've already promised, by 2020 the personal allowance will rise to £12,500 – 90 per cent higher than it was in 2010. And the higher rate threshold will stand at £50,000, protecting more and more people on middle incomes from paying the higher rate.

Today is an important milestone for the millions of people helped by these tax cuts. And with it, we are taking another step forward in our journey to becoming a country that really does work for everyone.

Speech: Brexit: Lessons, Challenges and Opportunities for Nigeria

The decision the British people made on 23rd June 2016 to leave the EU was a momentous one. It will lead to change, and much detail about that change is still uncertain. But there are some very important certainties, and I want to focus on those this morning.

Our Prime Minister, Theresa May, has made a very clear statement: "Brexit means Brexit, and we are going to make a success of it."

She has also been clear that making a success of Brexit is the most important task of the British Government. There will be many elements to making a success of Brexit. This afternoon I shall say something about four of them:

First: Democracy, and carrying out the mandate of the British people

Second: Creating a new relationship with Europe; and

Third: Forging a new role for Britain in the world.

Finally: what this means for Nigeria and its economy.

So firstly, the referendum was all about the British people deciding their future. The question was clear: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union, or leave the European Union?" The campaign was conducted with plenty of argumentation about the issues. The vote was held. Turnout was high, at over 72%. The electorate gave their verdict. A 52% majority voted to leave the European Union. And it is now the duty of Government and Parliament, to give effect to that democratic decision. That's how democracy works, and that's what we do when the people decide what they want for their country and their future.

I know that Nigerians also understand the importance of respecting the democratic decision-making process very well. I would liken it myself to the kind of example that President Goodluck Jonathan also gave when he handed power to President Buhari in 2015. He showed then that there could be a peaceful transition of power from one democratically elected civilian President to another in Nigeria. So following the BREXIT vote, it was a very powerful signal of democracy to the world that the then British Prime Minister did not dispute the outcome, accepted it and resigned his office to allow new leadership to take forward the choice the British people had decided upon. Many Nigerians commented to me how impressed they were by this show of confidence in both the choice the people had made and that once made the government's duty was to implement it.

As the British government sets about delivering on the UK referendum result it is clear that success means fully respecting the democratic mandate. There will be no attempt to remain inside the EU. There will be no attempt to rejoin the EU by other means. And there will be no second referendum. The

priority will be to regain more control of the numbers of people who come to the UK from Europe, whilst allowing British companies to trade with the EU's Single Market in goods and services. The relationship will also be one that allows for real and long term security co-operation, to help prevent and combat the kind of attacks we have seen by terrorists in Europe, Nigeria and most recently London on the Houses of Parliament. This brings me to how we create a new relationship with Europe and the world.

Britain's departure from the European Union does not mean we are leaving Europe. It does mean creating new forms of relations with our European partners. The task will be complex, and we are confident can be conducted within the two years allowed for in our Treaty obligations with the European Union. In that time, the British government will be focussed on getting the best outcome, not the quickest one.

What will success look like? Ultimately it will be for our Prime Minister and her cabinet to determine, and present to our parliament for their vote. But what is evident is that the UK will be looking for mutually beneficial arrangements that serve our intertwined interests well. The UK will not be following anyone else's model. The position we build outside the EU but in our relationship with the EU will be unique to Britain.

To achieve this, and to respect the mandate of the British people, will require fresh thinking and painstaking work. We are ready for that. And the principles we will follow in doing so have now been set out clearly by our Prime Minister. In announcing that the letter to formally trigger Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union had been delivered to the President of the European Council, British Prime Minister Theresa May MP said we were seeking "a partnership that works in the best interests of the United Kingdom, the European Union and the wider world." She emphasized that "perhaps now more than ever, the world needs the liberal, democratic values of Europe – values that" the "United Kingdom shares."

The third element in making a success of Brexit is therefore our role in the world.

Anyone who interpreted the referendum result as the UK retreating from the world, could not be more mistaken.

Britain is as committed as ever to working with our international partners to achieve a safer, healthier and more prosperous planet. The UK will continue to live up to its responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Our engagement as a NATO member is steadfast.

Our contributions through membership of the G7 and G20 will remain constructive and crucial to global stability. Our links with the Commonwealth, of which Nigeria is a key and major member, are unique and dynamic. The United Kingdom's undertaking to spend 0.7% of Gross National Income on international development, and 2% of Gross Domestic Product on defence is enshrined in our law and means that the UK is the only major economy to meet both those commitments.

The UK has been, and always will be a trading nation, keen on entrepreneurship and innovation. We are very proud that the UK is the fifth largest economy in the world, and ranked in the top six globally for ease of doing business. More than ever, we want to safeguard our reputation for providing an environment in which companies can prosper and pioneer for the future.

The characteristics which have made the UK a world leader in financial and other services have not altered with the decision to leave the European Union. Nor has our openness to business from around the globe. It is striking that on 1 August last year the first rupee denominated Masala bond to be issued outside India was arranged in London.

From what I have outlined, I hope you will have understood that the mindset of the British Prime Minister, her cabinet, and the British public service is to make Brexit work well, for the British people and for our relationships with Europe and for the global community of which Africa is such a crucial part.

And I want to reflect on the UK's partnership with Africa. Our diplomatic network – our number of embassies and offices – extends across the continent. The UK is still the largest European overseas investor in sub-saharan Africa, and the second largest globally. We remain committed to helping partner African states to alleviate poverty across the continent. Specifically, we have said that across Africa through our spending on international development in the next 5 years we will support 5.8 million children to gain a decent education, support 23.7 million people to have sustainable access to clean water or sanitation and provide 31.2 million women, adolescent girls and children with nutritional support. The UK's impact will be felt across Africa and we are glad to remain a steadfast partner to the continent.

So finally, what does this mean for Britain's relationship with Nigeria and what has or will change? In many ways very little has changed. Our bilateral trade relationship is still worth £3.8bn per annum. Shell, a British-Dutch company, has still invested billions of pounds into Nigeria and has around sixty onshore or shallow water oilfields and seven hundred wells. Shell still owns approximately one third of oil produced in Nigeria. Nigeria remains the largest oil producing country in Africa, in spite of the depressed price of oil at this time. The historical and cultural links between Nigeria and the UK, the common language of English that the vast majority of Nigerians speak, the strong educational and business links don't change.

If anything, I still see our connection becoming stronger. The UK is naturally looking to grow its market share, to encourage more businesses to come to Nigeria and to invest and to encourage more inward investment into the UK from Nigeria.

I don't know if it will mean more Nigerians travelling to the UK. In 2015, around 140,000 people applied for visas to the UK. Of those that applied for student visas, 90% were successful. For those that applied for other visas, around 70% were successful. Most people for some reason doubt this but it is true. We also introduced a same day service – at a cost – for visas in

Nigeria. And a service that can mean you get a visa within 5 days, at a lower cost than the same day process. Our turnaround time for all other visas is 15 days.

So we want Nigerians to travel to the UK. They come to do business, to study, to see family and to invest in our economy. There could be as many as 250,000 Nigerian nationals or dual Nigerian – British nationals living in the UK at the moment. The key thing for any visitor to the UK, whether they are from Nigeria or anywhere else, is that they respect the law and the length of time their visa says they can stay in the UK. A minority of Nigerian visitors don't do that and it is only with that minority that we have an issue.

I certainly hope Brexit will mean more British travellers visiting Nigeria, for the same reasons that Nigerians come to the UK. In particular I want people to come and explore the business opportunities that Nigeria offers. We think there are roughly 20,000 British and dual nationals living in Nigeria now. That figure may and I hope it will grow as British businesses of all sizes are encouraged to look outward still further, to export and do business, creating jobs in Nigeria.

It would help us of course if the process of getting a Nigerian visa was made easier and I have raised this with the Nigerian Foreign Minister and his team, and with the Nigerian High Commission in London. UK citizens should meet the requirements that the Nigerian government sets when they apply for a visa. I know that, and I would be the first to ensure they did that. But more Brits would come to Nigeria if it was simpler to apply for and the process for getting a visa was quicker. That is something for the Nigerian government to reflect on when they try to attract new investors to Nigeria.

Whatever Brexit means for the UK, it is also clear that Nigeria is going through a painful adjustment period as the Government seeks to diversify the economy away from being dependent on oil and gas and into other areas. I support that approach. The price of oil may increase. But that industry alone can't support the need for jobs that Nigerians now have. That's why the UK's Department for International Development has its second largest programme in Africa here in Nigeria, helping with the immediate needs of those in desperate circumstances in the north-east of Nigeria.

The UK has been among the leaders of the international response to the humanitarian crisis in the north-east of Nigeria. We scaled up our humanitarian funding from £1m in 2014 to 2015 to £74m in 2016 to 2017. In 2016 in Nigeria, we delivered food assistance to more than 1 million people and treated 34,000 children at risk of death from severe under-nourishment. We provided essential household items to more than 225,000 people who have fled from their homes and provided more than 135,000 people access clean water and sanitation. But the UK's development programme in Nigeria is also about education, growing the Nigerian economy with the skills that it needs for its population today and as that population expands.

I think what happens here in Nigeria and the choices made by the Nigerian government will be more important for the Nigerian economy than whatever Brexit may mean for Nigeria. And I am optimistic for the UK and I am

optimistic for Nigeria. I see the high calibre of the Nigerian business elite, many of whom are present in this room today. I know that Nigerian youth are enterprising and can-do. In my view, it is not oil or gas that are Nigeria's most important resource but its people. The human capital that Nigeria has – Nigerians themselves and their drive, determination and ability to get things done often when facing considerable challenges – are what makes me optimistic about Nigeria's future.

So in conclusion, Brexit means Brexit and Brexit will happen. The UK will leave the European Union. The process of leaving has begun. And we believe Britain will emerge still stronger and more engaged with the world and Nigeria thereafter. My job as Britain's High Commissioner is to make that happen, and I am committed to doing so – I hope with your help, advice and support.

Press release: Applications for permits received at Holmwood oilfield

The Environment Agency has received 3 applications for environmental permits at the Holmwood oil and gas site, off Coldharbour Lane, Surrey.

These applications are for 1 bespoke Environmental Permit and 2 Standard Rules Permits. They have been submitted by the site Europa Oil and Gas Limited to begin exploration drilling for oil or gas at the site.

In deciding whether or not to issue the permits, the Environment Agency will take into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

You can view and comment on the [application](#).

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

An environmental permit sets out stringent conditions that a site must adhere to. We will not issue an environmental permit for a site if we consider that activities taking place will cause significant pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

We are in the process of determining the applications to permit this site and we want to hear from the public and understand peoples' views. Everybody has the chance to see what the bespoke permit may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

For all media enquiries please contact 0800 141 2743 or email

Press release: Government helps dementia sufferers as part of next step in fight against nuisance calls

Rogue traders who bombard the elderly and vulnerable with nuisance phone calls are to be stopped in their tracks by a targeted Government scheme designed to protect those with dementia.

Every year, thousands of complaints are made about nuisance phone calls and in February last year, one firm alone was fined £350,000 for making more than 46 million automated calls.

To help tackle the problem, Prime Minister Theresa May, has today announced the launch of a half-a-million-pound project which will see hi-tech call blocking devices installed in the homes of some of the most vulnerable people across the UK who have been identified by doctors, Trading Standards officials and local councils as being at risk from nuisance callers.

The trueCall devices will completely block all recorded messages, silent calls and calls from numbers not already pre-identified by the home owner – offering particular protection to those with dementia.

The Prime Minister said:

We want to create a fairer society by cracking down on unscrupulous practices which target the most vulnerable.

This new, targeted scheme is the latest step in the government's fight against nuisance calls, protecting those who are most at risk, including those with dementia.

We have seen people tricked out of thousands of pounds by scam callers and this government is determined to clamp down on their activities once and for all.

The project, which is being funded by DCMS, co-ordinated by the National Trading Standards Scams Team and supported by local Trading Standards departments, is the latest of a series of Government crackdowns on nuisance callers

A similar trial scheme run by the National Trading Standards Scams Team last year resulted in 93% of participants feeling safer in their homes. This

included one person who had previously paid £150,000 to a scam caller.

The chief executive of Dementia UK, Hilda Hayo, said:

We welcome this project as some people living with dementia are vulnerable to nuisance callers who offer bogus services and financial schemes.

These calls can not only have a negative financial impact but can also lead to psychological affects such as anxiety, depression and a loss of self-esteem. We frequently receive calls to our national helpline from family members who are concerned that their relative with dementia has fallen prey to rogue traders.

This scheme will see the special devices installed in 1,500 homes. They will screen calls and can either ask callers to enter a security code which only genuine callers will know, or direct them to instead call a friend or relative of the home owner.

Lord Toby Harris, the Chair of National Trading Standards, said:

The impact of nuisance calls – both emotional and financial – cannot be underestimated. We know that these call blockers can make a real difference to people's lives and give those in vulnerable situations, such as those with dementia, and their families a greater sense of protection and security.

Working with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the Government has already forced companies to display their caller ID when cold calling and given out a series of hefty fines – totalling almost £7 million.

The Government will shortly implement plans to slap company bosses and firms with fines of up to £1 million if they are found to be in breach of Privacy and Electronics Communications Regulations.

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Notes to Editors:

- The funding for this scheme includes £300,000 to supply call blocking machines with the remaining budget spent on the management of the service and raising public awareness of scam and nuisance calls.
- Plans to make company bosses liable follows previous legislation where only businesses were liable for fines. Many of the businesses tried to escape paying nuisance call penalties by declaring bankruptcy – only to open up again under a different name.

- The ICO has issued fines totalling almost £7 million since 2012.
- In 2015, the ICO received almost 170,000 complaints about nuisance calls.
- To report a nuisance call visit: www.ico.org.uk
- See what else Government is doing to combat nuisance calls by searching for: #NoNuisance on social media.

[Press release: Antrim Area Hospital visit](#)

Earlier this morning the Secretary of State, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, visited Antrim Area hospital to see at first hand the issues and challenges that our current Health Service professionals face on a daily basis, and how the current political instability and lack of devolved institutions in Northern Ireland continues to add further burdens to an already pressurised health system.

The Northern Health Trust, of which Antrim Area Hospital is one of the major hospitals provides services for a population of approximately 471,000 – the largest resident population in Northern Ireland. Over recent months, the Trust have launched a reform and modernisation of the services they provide with a strong emphasis on maximising the range and sustainability of local services as well as ensuring integrated, and locality based community services delivered in partnership to allow and support people to live independently and avoid hospitalisation as far as possible.

Speaking after his visit, Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP said:

I was absolutely delighted to be able to visit Antrim Area Hospital and witness the truly remarkable work that is delivered by the doctors, nurses and support health care professionals on a daily basis. They provide a modernised approach to healthcare, ensuring local people can avail of a range of services close to their home locality. But the lack of devolved institutions provide uncertainty for those providing vital front line services.

Public services will suffer if there continues to be political

stalemate. Budgets need to be established in order to provide much needed services for the public. That is why I am urging the political parties to continue to talk and find a way through the outstanding issues. It remains important that an agreement is reached which enables the restoration of devolved government – this is absolutely critical for Northern Ireland and its people.

Whilst I recognise some of the issues are difficult, they are not insurmountable. The window in which this can happen is narrow, but it is my hope that the politicians will do all in their power to help to bring about the resumption of secure devolved government, an objective supported by the majority of the people in Northern Ireland, is our shared aim.

We owe it to the entire community to deliver the best outcome for Northern Ireland – strong devolved government with locally accountable Ministers.