

A wide ranging partnership

By HE DR NICOLA BREWER CMG

BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



DR NICOLA BREWER has a BA in English, a PhD in Linguistics and an honorary Law degree from the University of Leeds. She joined the FCO in 1983 and has served in New Delhi, Paris and Mexico City. From 2001-02 she was Director of Global Issues at the FCO becoming Director General for Europe in 2004. Prior to being appointed British High Commissioner to South Africa in July 2009 she was the first Chief Executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

I am delighted that President Zuma's first State Visit to Europe is to be to the UK. This year, thanks to the FIFA World Cup, all eyes will be on South Africa.

South Africa has just celebrated 20 years since the release of Nelson Mandela, a truly global icon, from prison. In that time, South Africa has made great strides in overcoming the terrible legacy of the apartheid system. It is entrenching democracy and the rule of law. It is building homes and providing water and seeking to reverse the effects of systematic exclusion. On regional, continental and global stages, South Africa is a respected voice. It will host the first World Cup ever held in Africa, which I believe will be a tremendously exciting, colourful – and noisy – event for football fans everywhere. South Africa has helped Africa take its rightful place in the world, including in the important new forum of the G20.

History binds the UK and South Africa together. But there is more to the relationship than that. We have a common, contemporary interest in addressing issues of global importance, and looking for shared solutions together. So many issues in the modern world no longer stop at national borders. An economic crisis reverberates around the globe; conflicts spread across regions; migration impacts on countries of origin and of destination; climate change, HIV/AIDS, poverty are no respecters of borders. We both want to improve skills and education that allow Britons and South Africans to benefit from globalisation. History does help. Our two countries are used to doing business together. I am confident that this State Visit will show South Africa as a Premier League partner of choice for the UK, and the UK for South Africa. The number of Ministers accompanying President Zuma, and seeing their UK counterparts, is a testament to the wide range of our partnership and the amount of international business we conduct together.

The State Visit could not have come at a better time for our trade and business relationship, as the UK and South African economies both emerge from recession. Our trading partnership is already in the Premier League, with nearly £10 billion in two way trade in goods and services. Many household British names have made significant investments in South Africa and become household South African names, showing South Africa's enormous potential as an investment destination for UK companies.

We are also keen to welcome South African investors to the UK. Some of the largest South African companies have invested and listed on the Stock Market in London. Four out of five South African companies investing in Europe decide to locate in the UK. They find at first hand that the UK is the easiest place in Europe in which to set up and do business.

The time is right to strengthen this long-standing commercial relationship. President Zuma is travelling with the largest ever South African business delegation to Europe – over 200 companies. They will have detailed sectoral meetings with UK firms, creating new connections and exploring potential deals. With the spotlight shining brightly on South Africa this year, the business elements to the State Visit are all about highlighting the opportunities that exist in our two countries, then matching those opportunities with South African and British expertise to form long lasting, sustainable relationships.

Strong partnerships aren't just being built business-to-business and government-to-government. They are also being created between British and South African universities, schools, NGOs and cultural institutions. Hardly a week goes by without a new project. I am always particularly delighted to encourage new connections between the next generations in South Africa and the UK – creating new reflexes in our young people to travel to, study in, and trade with each other's country.

There's always lots of pomp and ceremony to State Visits. That's a vivid reminder of our history, and shows respect to the relationship with a nation we value. It's also a very visible endorsement of a Premier League partnership between two countries which share values, goals and a mutual desire to work together, and to keep talking even when we have different perspectives. I look forward with confidence to the concrete ideas that will emerge from this visit to develop our modern, robust partnership. **F**

UK-SA Trade and Investment

- Circa £10 billion in two-way trade
- UK is the second largest investor in SA
- 80% of South African companies investing in Europe, locate in the UK