

200 years of cooperation

By **JEREMY BROWNE MP**

MINISTER OF STATE FOR LATIN AMERICA, UNITED KINGDOM



JEREMY BROWNE graduated in Politics from Nottingham University. He began his career in 1994 as a public affairs consultant at Drewe Rogerson Ltd, joining Edelman Communications in 2002 and becoming Associate Director of Reputation Inc in 2003. He was elected MP for Taunton in 2005 and has held a number of positions in the Liberal Democrat party, including Shadow Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Shadow Minister of Home Affairs and Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. He was appointed Minister of State at the FCO in May 2010.

2010 marks 200 years of Chilean independence, and Chile's longstanding commitment to peace, democracy, social justice and economic opportunity. In this bicentennial year, I take particular pleasure in celebrating the strength and value of UK-Chile relations. Ours is a close friendship based not only on historical ties but years of shared political, economic and commercial endeavour. The emergence of what the Foreign Secretary has called a "networked world of rising economies and new forms of diplomacy" can only be good news for our friendship: we still have so much to work on together. President Piñera's visit to London is an excellent opportunity to set the course for the future of our partnership and we welcome him and Foreign Minister Moreno here warmly.

Our countries' links date back to the first days of Chilean independence. One of the earliest and most famous concerns Lord Thomas Cochrane, a British Naval officer to whom the Chileans offered command of their navy in 1817. Cochrane's role (and that of the British officers who fought alongside him) in assuring Chilean independence, and subsequently developing the Chilean Navy, laid the foundations of the close ties that exist to this day between the Royal Navy and the Chilean Navy.

I was proud to see these for myself when I was hosted at the Chilean Navy Headquarters in Valparaíso in August and delighted to see how we have gone on to build an expansive bilateral relationship which today encompasses political, social and economic issues of global importance.

Chile was a natural choice for my first visit to Latin America this summer. I was struck immediately on arrival in Santiago that there is an obvious affinity between our countries. The conversations I had during my stay with President Piñera, the business community, Congressmen and Senators only reinforced this instinctive familiarity. I very much enjoyed my discussion with President Piñera about the new coalition government in Britain. He took a close interest in how it had been formed and in what our plans were. I was delighted to be able to announce, with Foreign Minister Moreno, another important demonstration of this closeness: the return to the La Compañía de Jesús church of its bells, housed for most of the last 150 years in Oystermouth church in Wales after the fire which destroyed their original home in

1863. We hope the UK's bicentennial gift to Chile will be a symbol for all Chileans of the friendship between them and the British people.

As I write, the world is glued to its televisions watching the San José miners return to their families. I arrived in Santiago just as the news broke that they were trapped. Many feared the worst, but 16 days later, the announcement that all 33 men had been found alive was headline news in both Chile and the UK and now the end of their ordeal is receiving blanket coverage.

The ingenuity and dedication of all involved in the rescue effort, led by President Piñera and his Mining Minister Laurence Golborne, is a shining example of Chilean innovation and expertise.

The constant vigil by families and loved ones at the makeshift Camp Hope at the pithead is an important reminder of the dangers miners face on a daily basis. With emerging economies like China now consuming up to 60 per cent more copper than 5 years ago, it is imperative that safety and expansion go hand in hand as Chile looks to meet this new demand.

President Piñera's leadership of this latest crisis has been characteristic of his presidency. His government has worked tirelessly and with huge ambition to ensure Chile continues to progress. The economy is on course for continued growth. Real economy indicators such as energy consumption, mining output, and supermarket sales all continue to grow robustly. The rate of unemployment has fallen slightly, inflation is steady and there is low domestic and foreign debt. This is a laudable achievement for any administration, but for one dealing with the effects of such a devastating natural disaster and amid the global economic crisis it is remarkable.

The world was watching Chile in February too, as the fifth largest earthquake on record caused the deaths of over five hundred people. The images we all saw spoke a thousand words about sheer ferocity of the earthquake and resulting tsunamis. It is clear that they had the potential to cause a far higher death toll and seriously derail the economic progress of a flourishing nation. Chile's rigorously-applied building regulations and probity of its construction industry played an important role in limiting the devastation. During my briefing from Chilean naval personnel who had responded to emergency calls in the aftermath of the earthquake, I was struck by their strength and determination in the face of such adversity. This was

matched across countless local communities where people quickly picked themselves up and returned to relative normality against all odds. As well as a sign of political leadership, it is testament to the attitude of Chile's people that it is now, just seven months on, well on the way to making a full recovery. More than 80 per cent of infrastructural damage has been repaired and the government has already achieved its targets of building emergency housing for the homeless, getting all children back to school, and replacing the majority of hospital beds lost. The economy is also recovering with the GDP growth rate (expected by analysts to take a two point hit following the disaster) on course for around 5 per cent growth overall in 2010.

President Piñera highlighted this progress in his speech at the United Nations General Assembly last month, alongside reaffirming his commitment to the rule of law, the international system and a strong pledge to improve indigenous rights. We welcome this and congratulate Chile on its contribution to UN peacekeeping work in Haiti.

The UK wants an enhanced relationship with Chile. President Piñera's visit will add new momentum to our already excellent political relationship. That can also be further improved with even better commercial and cultural ties.

Chile is one of the easiest and most competitive places to do business in Latin America. UK-Chile trade is increasing significantly: in 2009 UK exports reached £478 million, and £295 million in the first five months of 2010, comprising mostly petroleum-related products, power generation and industrial machinery, medicines, beverages and vehicles. The UK is the lead importer of Chilean wine, and it is fitting that the President will sample some of the finest Chilean wines during his visit to the UK. Thanks to the EU-Chile free trade agreement, over 90 per cent of EU products can be imported tariff-free.


The UK is already the fourth largest foreign investor in Chile, largely in the mining sector. We want to diversify our interests in Chile to increase this ranking and encourage further Chilean investment into the UK. One priority is in the low-carbon sector. As the world moves away from carbon-rich production methods, low carbon will be a future driver of economic growth, with those at the forefront of using that technology best placed to benefit. Chile's spectacular geography means it is vulnerable to the effects of climate change, but also possesses valuable natural resources which place Chile at that forefront of a new generation of high-value jobs in a green economy.

2010 has seen Chile's long-awaited accession to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through which Chile pledged full dedication to the organisation's fundamental aims.

Chile is only the second Latin American country to join the OECD (after Mexico) following a rigorous 3 year application process. This represents a mark of recognition for the hard work of successive Chilean governments and the UK will work closely with Chile in all aspects of the OECD's work – from economic and financial policy to education, employment and social affairs.

We are looking to foster closer cultural links. President Piñera has earmarked education and English language teaching as areas for improvement and the UK should be at the forefront of collaboration through the British Council. We have learnt much from our successful partnerships in Colombia and Mexico and are in excellent shape to extend this to Chile. The British Council plays an important role in enhancing crucial friendships and fostering mutual understanding and partnerships.

So, relations between our countries have a great deal of history behind them, and an even brighter future ahead. Over the coming months I look forward to stepping up the bilateral relationship at the highest levels, increasing our work together in areas such as sustainable energy, defence and human rights, while promoting further the already record levels of bilateral trade. We also look forward to making a major contribution to Chile's future: in its post-earthquake reconstruction effort, in its major set of planned infrastructural projects, and in its determination to step up levels of English language proficiency throughout the country.

Chile is in excellent shape to face up to the many challenges on its way to becoming a fully developed country by 2020, and the UK stands ready to help as a steadfast friend, today and far into the future. 

Chile is one of the easiest and most competitive places to do business in Latin America

Minister of State for Latin America, Jeremy Browne MP, and Chilean Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alfredo Moreno

