



**Introduction by
The Rt Hon Lord Hurd
of Westwell CH CBE PC
Chairman, FIRST
Advisory Council**

It give me great pleasure to introduce this official FIRST Report on Kuwait to mark the 50th Anniversary of Kuwait's Independence and the 20th Anniversary of Liberation. Both anniversaries are important milestones in Kuwait's history and we at FIRST are extremely pleased to have been asked to produce this special report. We are especially grateful for the help and assistance of HE Khaled Al-Duwaisan, Kuwait's distinguished and long-serving Ambassador in London.

I remember well my first visit to Kuwait in 1970 when I was working for Sir Edward Heath, then leader of the opposition. Since then I have been a frequent visitor, sometimes as Minister of the Crown or, more recently, as a friend. A particularly poignant memory for me was of a visit as Foreign Secretary immediately after the Liberation of Kuwait in 1991. I remember vividly the ravages of war and of the Iraqi occupation. I look with some pride at the way the British worked with others to secure the straight forward aim of reversing the Iraqi aggression in 1991 and restoring Kuwait to its rightful independence.

The leadership and people of Kuwait have demonstrated singular resilience over the past fifty years and the country has developed considerably, both economically and politically. A relatively open economy is underpinned by significant oil reserves (reported to be 102 billion barrels) – about 9 per cent of the world's reserves. Petroleum accounts for about half of GDP, some 95 per cent of export revenues and 95 per cent of Government income. The recent rise in global oil prices has propelled Kuwait's economic growth with Government revenues increasing by 20 per cent.

The economy is also predicted to benefit from the privatisation bill passed in May 2010 and the economic development plan of January 2011 that pledges US\$130 billion of expenditure over five years with the aim of attracting investment, increasing private sector participation in the economy and

diversifying the economy away from oil.

The past fifty years have also witnessed important political developments. The Al-Sabah family returned to power in 1991 and re-established an elected legislature that has become increasingly assertive in recent years. In May 2009 there was the historic election of four women to the National Assembly. Within the region, Kuwait has been a front runner in the development of its parliamentary systems and in the strengthening of the status of women in society.

The friendship between the UK and Kuwait is a long and fruitful one. Kuwait is the UK's third largest trading partner in the Gulf with the two countries enjoying a strong and growing bilateral relationship. The last few years have seen the strengthening of political, economic and cultural ties and both countries have hosted visits for Ministers, officials, parliamentary members, friendly societies, trade and commerce teams and welfare organisations.

The Prime Minister, David Cameron, led a successful visit earlier this year and conducted discussions on bilateral relations and the situation in the Arab world. A joint Kuwaiti-UK Trade and Investment Task Force was established which will further promote the trade and investment relationship.

Over the past fifty years, Kuwait has survived and prospered in a turbulent part of the world. This success is the result of the good sense of its people and the wise guidance which it has received from His Highness the Amir and his predecessor Sheikh Jabr. I am certain that Kuwait will continue to encourage trade and investment and as a result will thrive to the mutual benefit of all Kuwaitis and the country's friends. Of these friends the United Kingdom was historically the first and will always be the foremost.

We hope this FIRST report will underline the importance of the 50th Anniversary of Independence, the 20th Anniversary of Liberation and help serve to strengthen this important bilateral relationship. **E**