

Close and historic ties

By H.E. SCOTT WIGHTMAN

AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA



SCOTT WIGHTMAN became the British Ambassador to the Republic of Korea in November 2011. Prior to joining the Diplomatic Service, he studied French and European Institutions at Edinburgh University. After studying Chinese, his first posting was in Beijing where he worked in the Commercial Section in the British Embassy from 1986 to 1989. Since then Scott has worked on political issues at the British Embassy in Paris and served as Deputy Ambassador in Rome. His most recent role was Director for the Asia Pacific region at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London.

British veterans present scholarships to Korean students during the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of the Imjin

The State Visit of President Park to the United Kingdom is a unique opportunity to reflect, celebrate and elevate the close and historic relationship between Korea and the UK. Her Majesty the Queen generally hosts two such visits each year. This is the second visit from a Korean Head of State in under ten years, a fact that serves to underline the importance we attach to our relationship with one of our closest friends and allies in Asia and beyond. All of us at the British Embassy in Seoul are looking forward to the visit and determined to ensure President Park leaves in no doubt as to the depth and range of opportunities that exist to build upon our existing links.

2013 is a particularly important year for our relationship as we mark 130 years of diplomatic ties. Monarchs, Presidents and Prime Ministers have come and gone; our nations have experienced turmoil and growth, conflict and celebration but the partnership built on shared values and principles is firm and continues to grow.

In the years since 1883, when British diplomat William George Aston signed a treaty with Min Yong-mok in Gyeongbuk Palace, generations of Britons and Koreans have worked to foster greater understanding and exchange between our peoples,

increase trade and develop political cooperation. The scale of the work has changed. In 1910 there were around 160 British nationals in Korea and much of the reporting from the British Consulate General – as it was then known – was limited to the scope and effects of Japanese imperialism. Today, there are around 8000 UK citizens in Korea at any one time, our political teams work on issues ranging from inter-Korean matters to cooperation in conflict zones, and our trade team supports a bilateral relationship worth £10bn in goods and services in 2012. That figure is more than double what it was just 16 years ago.

Arguably, the tragic events of the Korean War bonded our two countries even more closely together. The United Kingdom was the second largest contributor of troops to the UN forces fighting alongside those of the Republic of Korea. Over 1000 British servicemen lost their lives in the conflict. That sacrifice will never be forgotten in either country. In April, I welcomed around 80 British and Irish veterans of the conflict back to Korea. The warmth with which they were greeted by Koreans showed the great regard in which they, and the UK, are held here. The men who returned with their families were awe-struck by the modern, dynamic and beautiful country they fought to protect more than 60 years ago. I am particularly pleased that President



Park's visit includes a ground-breaking ceremony for the new memorial to mark the sacrifice of our troops during the Korean War.

It is important that we acknowledge and celebrate these historic ties. However, as British Ambassador to the Republic of Korea, a priority for me is to showcase modern Britain and the ways in which our partnership can move forward, delivering peace and prosperity for future generations of Koreans and Brits.

We are working with the Republic of Korea at the United Nations to tackle regional and international instability. Korean armed forces, like our own, have played a key role in conflict zones across the world. South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se is a champion of the Foreign Secretary's Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict initiative (PSVI) and jointly presented a Declaration on PSVI at the United Nations earlier this year. In the north-east Asian region, we support President Park's efforts toward building trust with North Korea and combating the threat that country continues to pose to international peace and security.

Our economic relationship continues to go from strength to strength. There is much to be proud of: the UK as a creative powerhouse; Korea as a leader at bringing those new ideas to market. Our companies work hand-in-hand across sectors – from high-tech manufacturing to electronics, offshore wind to nuclear. All this explains why Korean goods exports to the UK increased 24 per cent last year, and UK goods exports to Korea 15 per cent (excluding oil), clear proof that companies in both countries are seeing the opportunities in the EU/Korea. It is important that we uphold the spirit of that Agreement and implement its commitments in full. We need open, global trade and a stable and sustainable regulatory environment. To that end, President Park's visit will mark the launch of a Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), ensuring our Governments have a forum to deepen cooperation across a range of sectors. Alongside JETCO, business leaders from the UK and Korea will come together at a CEO Forum. This combination of government-to-government talks and direct links for business will ensure both countries take advantage of the opportunities to boost trade further.

President Park's vision for Korea's creative economy sits well with our own status as a global leader in the field. Our creative industries are worth £36bn a year to our economy and the 1.5million people who work in this sector generate £70,000 every minute for the UK economy. We will bring this expertise to life during the State Visit, giving President Park and the Korean delegation a showcase of great British creativity.

Many of the UK's world class universities have already forged links with Korean counterparts. As the

nation with more Nobel Prize wins than any other country besides the United States, our research and innovation is well known in Korea. We should harness this strength and look to expand R&D cooperation across science and technology, as Korea invests heavily in its own R&D base.

Educational exchanges between our people are central to the future of the relationship. Every year, thousands of Korean students choose the UK for further education. I hope many more will follow them and that increasing numbers of British students will come to Korea too.

The power of British culture and Brand Britain is a major asset for us. Iconic films like Harry Potter and the James Bond series – the two highest grossing movie series of all time – boost our engagement with the Korean public. From the Beatles to Adele, Elton John to Franz Ferdinand, UK music is recognised for its quality and diversity, playing alongside Psy, Girls Generation and other K-Pop stars in bars, cars and headsets across Korea. Burberry, DAKS and Paul Smith are just three of the cutting-edge British brands that constitute must haves for Korea's fashion-conscious, stylish consumers in Gangnam and the rest of the country.

Whether one takes politics, economics, education, science or culture as a starting point, the solid base of the UK-Korea relationship is clear for all to see. All of these facets will be recognised, celebrated and boosted during the State Visit. I am confident that President Park will be invigorated by her trip and that she and her Government will work with us to move this creative partnership for peace and prosperity to ever higher levels.

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The 'British fair' at the Lotte Department Store in Seoul

