

New frontiers for cooperation

By **HON BERNARD K. MEMBE**

MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, TANZANIA



BERNARD MEMBE was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in 2007. He began his career at the foreign affairs ministry and was first elected an MP in 2000. He served as both Deputy Minister of Home Affairs and of Energy and Minerals before assuming his current position. He is currently the Chairman of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and previously served as Chair of the Executive Council of the African Union. He is a graduate of the University of Dar es Salaam and John Hopkins University, Baltimore.

You currently occupy the Chair of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. How do you envisage the future and relevance of this organisation?

Despite the challenges the Commonwealth faces, the future of the organisation is bright. The Commonwealth is currently undergoing reforms in many areas to ensure that all the challenges we face are properly addressed.

On the question of the relevance, the Commonwealth remains more relevant than ever. Member countries benefit immensely from the organisation. Firstly, it provides member countries a platform to build common positions on issues of mutual interest and thus create a stronger bargaining voice in other multilateral forums.

Member countries also have investment opportunities and are able to access a market of more than two billion people particularly through the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC): Tanzania's largest trading partners are Commonwealth countries, including the United Kingdom, India, Kenya, and South Africa.

Member countries have also been able to access technology from other members of the Commonwealth, particularly through the Commonwealth of Learning (COL). Also, through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation (CFTC) member countries benefit from various courses, training and technical assistance, which are very important in our quest for development.

It is also important to note that the Commonwealth is currently working on finding ways to ease the issuance of visas in order to increase interaction between member countries.

On the occasion of this important anniversary, what is your message to the international community?

As the current Chair of CMAG, I would like to call upon the international community to work together to promote democracy, the rule of law, and good governance, since they are the foundations for peace, and economic development for our countries.

We also should tirelessly help member countries that experience conflict to resolve them peacefully and encourage them to observe the principles democratic governments and peaceful co-existence.

What is your assessment of current Tanzanian-British relations?

Bilateral relations between the two countries are excellent. The United Kingdom is among the oldest of Tanzania's major bilateral partners, having the second largest development programme after the World Bank.

The UK is the number one investor in Tanzania, with a 35 per cent share of foreign direct investment, UK companies invested around US\$5.1 billion in Tanzania in the period of 1990 – 2013 creating 271,000 jobs, almost four times as many as any other investor. Bilateral trade was worth US\$340 million.

British firms play an important role in all the major sectors including energy, communications, construction, banking, agriculture and the nascent oil and gas sector, where the British company BG Group alone has invested in the excess of US\$1 billion.

How would you assess the UK's push to change its development cooperation policy from aid to trade via the UK Prosperity Partnership?

Tanzania is one of five African countries, along with Ghana, Mozambique, the Ivory Coast, and Angola to form the high-level prosperity partnership with the UK. In Tanzania, the partnership has a total of four areas of cooperation namely: Oil and Gas; Agriculture; Renewable Energy and Strengthening Business Environment worth £20 million. The initiative is expected to strengthen economic cooperation and trade ties between the UK and Tanzania, which in the end will drive growth and prosperity in Tanzania and the UK. It is expected that the partnership will double the number of UK companies doing business in Tanzania, particularly in the renewable energy and agriculture sectors by 2015. Trade and business relations between Tanzania and the UK have been strengthening over time. However, the environment of doing business in Tanzania for foreign investors has been inefficient at times. In addressing these challenges the Tanzania government has created a system at the Tanzania Investment Centre which enables investors to get everything such as registration, licensing, taxation and permits in one place. The lack of direct flights from the UK to Tanzania may hamper the growth of trade between the two countries. Therefore, the Government of the United Kingdom should be requested to approach British Airways so that they may resume direct flights from the UK to Tanzania.