

Old friends, significant partners

By H.E. DUNCAN TAYLOR CBE

AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE UNITED MEXICAN STATES



DUNCAN TAYLOR joined the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1982. In addition to undertaking a wide range of jobs at the FCO in London, during his career he has held the positions of High Commissioner to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, Second Secretary in Havana, Head of Commercial Section in Budapest, and Governor in Grand Cayman. He was awarded a CBE in 2002 for his work in helping the families of British Victims of the 9/11 attacks in New York.

Mexico is a natural strategic partner for the UK. We are like-minded, share values on a wide range of key issues which matter to both countries and have the potential to become significant partners in business. The timely State Visit by President Enrique Peña Nieto will help to develop further the excellent relationship we already enjoy.

Mexico is an important country. It has the second largest economy in Latin America and the fifteenth largest in the world. By some forecasts Mexico could be the seventh largest economy in the world by 2050. And Mexico has a young, energetic and creative population. On the world stage Mexico is an increasingly important player. The UK and Mexico are remarkably like minded on many issues which help to shape the world we live in and the world we want to live in: we work closely and effectively on sustainable development and Climate Change, on international development, on transparency and open government, on free trade and open economies and in the UN, including on human rights.

Mexico is an old friend of the UK. We were the first European country to recognise Mexico's independence and to start trading with Mexico in the nineteenth century. By the early twentieth century Mexico had become an important economic partner. But in the second half of the twentieth century, the UK's diplomatic engagement focussed more on other areas of the world and the UK's relationship with Mexico saw a period of relative quiet. That changed in 2010 when the then Foreign Secretary, William Hague, launched the "Canning Initiative," aimed at strengthening relations with Latin America. Our relationship with Mexico has since grown very rapidly, particularly in respect of our commercial, political and cultural links. And this year promises to be a very special year indeed for our two countries; we are celebrating the Year of the UK in Mexico 2015 and, simultaneously, the Year of Mexico in the UK. The 'Dual Year' was agreed by the two governments to celebrate the increasingly strong links between our nations, transform perception in each other's countries and build a legacy for the future.

The Year of the UK in Mexico 2015 has three strands: arts and the creative economy; education, science and innovation; and trade and investment. These are all areas where we already have good existing connections but where we also see real potential to work more closely together. These themes are also integral elements of the State Visit.

The arts and creative economy strand promotes the outstanding and rich culture in both countries; and celebrates the creativity of the British and Mexican people. Trade and education will also be part of our largest cultural event of the Year – the UK's programme as Guest of Honour at the Guadalajara International Book Fair, the second largest in the world. Plans to bring the *Designing 007: Fifty Years of Bond Style* exhibition to Mexico will allow us to promote British design and technology, coinciding with the release of the new Bond movie, part of which be filmed in Mexico City.

The education, science and innovation strand focuses on the future. Signing an agreement on the mutual recognition of educational awards will be transformational, benefitting some 170,000 graduates of UK and Mexican institutions. We are on track to increase our offering of Chevening scholarships from 20 to 100. Increasing numbers of us are studying, visiting and working in each other's countries, reflecting the importance we attach to building long-term personal links. Through the Newton Fund, set up to promote Science and Innovation links, we are supporting 45 Mexican researchers, helping them to bring pioneering ideas to market. And, as guest of honour at Mexico's National Week for Science and Technology, we will reach young audiences across the country, exploring the cross-over between science and the arts and laying foundations for future collaboration.

Our two countries already play a leading role in the global economy, working together in the G20 and the OECD to promote openness and transparency, better tax regulation and to boost free trade. Our aim is that the trade and investment strand of the Dual Year will help us meet our target of increasing bilateral trade to £4.2bn by the end of 2015. Mexico's energy reform is expected attract substantial invest and collaboration by major UK companies, generating opportunities for UK companies along the entire supply chain. President Peña Nieto's State Visit will bring together senior business leaders from both sides, will underline the strength of the UK offer in energy and other sectors and will, I am sure, help promote long-term business links by highlighting the opportunities that we can each offer the other and the expertise we each have to deliver on those opportunities.

The Dual Year of Mexico and the UK 2015 will tap into the potential, the energy and the talent each country has to offer. Working together we aim to build a legacy that will last well beyond 2015. **F**