

# A strong bond of friendship

By **H.E. MICHAEL DAVENPORT MBE**

AMBASSADOR OF THE UNITED KINGDOM TO THE STATE OF KUWAIT



**MICHAEL DAVENPORT** was appointed British Ambassador to the State of Kuwait in 2017. Before this appointment he was EU Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Serbia, having served as British Ambassador to Serbia. He has also completed postings in Egypt, Poland and Russia. At the FCO he was Director for Russia, the South Caucasus and Central Asia from 2007-2010, while in the mid-1990s he headed the FCO's UN Peacekeeping Section. He holds a degree in Modern Languages from Cambridge University and is a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales.

HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II during the Amir's State Visit in 2012

The Kuwait Towers are an iconic landmark of modern Kuwait. We have a good view of these striking and dramatic buildings from the British Residence on Kuwait's Gulf Road. So we felt a surge of excitement and joy when we watched from our terrace as the Towers were lit up on January the 23rd this year with the Kuwaiti flag and the Union Jack - to mark the 120th Anniversary of the 1899 Treaty of Friendship between Kuwait and the United Kingdom.

We were enormously grateful to His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, for this generous gesture of enduring friendship. It also meant a great deal to us all when His Excellency Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and His Excellency the Minister of Information and Youth Affairs Mohammed Nasser Abdullah Al-Jabri hosted a memorable event on that same day to mark this auspicious Anniversary.

This Treaty, kept secret at the time, was hugely significant for both our countries. It was in fact the

first formal engagement ever executed between a ruler of Kuwait and the government of any country. Only days after the treaty was signed the British government issued instructions to deploy naval force to prevent an attack on Kuwait. In the 120 years since then Britain has maintained a lasting commitment to Kuwait's security.

Britain's commitment continued beyond Kuwait's independence in 1961, when we deployed armed force to help deter foreign aggression. When Kuwait was invaded and occupied by Iraq in August 1990 Britain under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher played a leading role in securing a UN mandate for an international coalition to be formed for the liberation of Kuwait.

Britain was proud to be a member of that international coalition. We are proud to this day of our armed forces who served bravely alongside coalition and Kuwaiti friends and succeeded in restoring Kuwait's sovereignty and independence.

Kuwaiti-British relations stretch back way beyond 1899, well into the 18th century. When the British East



India Company ran into difficulty with the Ottomans in Basra it should come as no surprise that Kuwait, with its excellent natural harbour and openness to trade, should have offered an attractive refuge.

But the 1899 Treaty ushered in a period of extraordinary expansion in relations between our two countries which continued throughout the 20th century and right up to the present day. Britain has become a home from home for many Kuwaitis. More Kuwaitis are now studying at British universities than ever before. Indeed more Kuwaitis are travelling to Britain than ever before.

In 1952 Britain was poised for an extended period of economic growth, even though rationing and shortages after the Second World War made this far from obvious at the time. Kuwait's decision to establish the Kuwait Investment Office in post-war London was therefore a resounding vote of confidence in London and the British economy. Trade and investment have seen continuous growth ever since.

A key outcome of the State Visit to Britain by His Highness the Amir in 2012 was the establishment of a new framework for our relations in the form of the Joint Steering Group, or JSG. The JSG will meet for the 14th time in London this summer, helping us to deepen and broaden our co-operation across a wide front.

The JSG has helped us to deepen our defence and

security co-operation. In the year ahead our armed forces will be exercising and training together more than ever before. We are close allies in the international Counter-Daesh Coalition.

The United Kingdom is committed to supporting His Highness the Amir's exciting new plans for modernisation and diversification of the economy under his Vision 2035, drawing on British expertise in areas from infrastructure development to education and training, cyber and aviation security to healthcare and the creative economy.

To mark the 120th Anniversary the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra made its first ever visit to Kuwait this year. London plays host to further celebrations in June.

Britain and Kuwait enjoy distinguished and exceptionally special relations. Our duty and challenge will be to ensure that our relations endure to keep pace with global developments and that they are fit for purpose in the twenty-first century.

We are well placed to fulfil this duty and to meet this challenge side by side. Our strong bond of friendship is matched by a close identity of interests and values, as we can see in the excellent co-operation we enjoy in the United Nations Security Council. So I feel confident in wishing our two countries a happy Anniversary as well as a further 120 years of friendship and partnership, well into the next century.

## Britain and Kuwait enjoy distinguished and exceptionally special relations

Left: The Kuwait Towers with the Kuwait flag and Union Jack

Right: HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and HRH The Duke of Edinburgh during the Amir's State Visit in 2012

