

A 21st Century partnership

By H.E. DAVID CONCAR

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DAVID CONCAR has been British High Commissioner in Dar es Salaam since 2020. He joined the FCDO in 2004, serving initially in China before returning to London as Head of the Climate Change & Energy Department before departing to Mogadishu to serve as Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Somalia before taking up the position in Tanzania.

My time in Tanzania has coincided with the country marking its 60th year of independence from Britain. Such milestones are opportunities both for celebration and for reflection. At the British High Commission we marked the anniversary with an exhibition of photographs charting six decades of post-independence bilateral relations.

The images tell a rich story of events past. They also offer inspiration for the future as President Samia resets Tanzania's international relations and reopens the door to investors after a difficult few years.

Commonwealth connections and Royal visits feature prominently in the exhibition. It has wonderful photographs of HRH King Charles III's visit to Tanzania while he was Prince of Wales in 2011 and the Prince of Wales' visit as Duke of Cambridge in 2018, alongside iconic images of Her late Majesty The Queen being hosted by Tanzania's founding president, Julius Nyerere, in 1979.

The exhibition captures key political moments too – including an image from 2005 of Chancellor Gordon Brown visiting to sign a milestone agreement for debt relief. At that time, Tanzania was weighed down by international debt repayments. The relief agreed during the chancellor's visit was the starting point for a wider G7 agreement, brokered by the UK, to write off debts of the world's poorest countries. Also featured are photographs from 2014 of Tanzania's then president, Jakaya Kikwete, meeting then Prime Minister David Cameron in London. That visit led to agreements across an impressive range of areas: commercial cooperation, renewable energy partnerships, development of Tanzania's offshore gas, tax reform, cooperation between the two countries' militaries, and joint efforts to tackle drugs trafficking and other transnational crimes.

Much good work followed and many of these areas of collaboration continue to bear fruit. Indeed, in total the UK has invested some £800m of aid (official development assistance) in Tanzania since 2015 on a range of programmes including to expand access to quality education in Tanzania.

Nevertheless it is fair to say that efforts to realise the full ambition of the 2014 visit met with headwinds following Tanzania's elections of 2015. A shift in the country's approach to domestic political freedoms, international relations and foreign investment presented

challenges to those wishing to invest from overseas. And engagement on aid flows became more complicated too.

Thankfully, optimism is returning. President Samia's government has taken steps to welcome back investors. Previously halted commercial negotiations have resumed. Relations with neighbouring countries have improved, including with respect to cross-border trade. And on both the mainland and semi-autonomous Zanzibar promising cross-party dialogues on domestic political, electoral and constitutional reforms are under way.

For sure, the challenges Samia inherited run deep. Memories of the 2020 elections, marred by irregularities and violence, especially on Zanzibar, remain fresh, and progress on many issues will take time. But there is no question that Samia's government has begun to build a more positive story, reviving hopes for reforms capable of unlocking Tanzania's considerable potential for economic and democratic growth.

In support, we have resumed government-government dialogue on business environment issues, underpinned by an annual business forum involving the private sectors of both countries. This builds on the still strong foundations of Britain's historical investment (the UK continues to rank as Tanzania's largest holder of Foreign Direct Investment stock). Meanwhile on Zanzibar the formation of a cross-party 'government of national unity' has enabled us to resume broad-based engagement. We are also strengthening our bilateral partnership on climate change. As any one of the 75,000 Brits who visit Tanzania for tourism in a typical year will know, this is a country blessed with extraordinary natural assets, including the best safari in the world. But it is also home to one of the world's highest rates of deforestation and is being badly impacted by climate change. As the host of COP26 and a longstanding bilateral partner, we are committed to assisting Tanzania to access the flows of international climate finance it will need to adapt and to protect its forests. In pursuing this goal, we are blessed with an abundance of UK financing and private sector expertise.

Britain and Tanzania go back a long way, and not all of our shared history has been easy. But this is a relationship with deep foundations. My High Commission team and I are committed to doing all we can to help build a thriving 21st century partnership based on trust, respect and mutual interests in tackling poverty and other global challenges.