

Your Excellency, good. But not good enough. Both sides need to raise their game. In a small way, I hope the size and seniority of the delegation I have brought with me is an earnest of our intent to do better. Not just by you, but by ourselves. For part of the challenge for us, at time when the gaps in understanding between faiths and between cultures are so insistently obvious, is to know more about you and your culture, as you seek to know more about us and our culture. That is why I am proud that my Department has announced plans for a dramatic increase in the quality and quantity of Arab and Islamic studies at British universities. As more of your students come our way, so I hope more of ours will come yours.

In making that easier for both sides, we cannot be complacent. But we can take quiet pride in some of the things that, between us, we do get right. The unostentatious efficiency, for example, of the British Government's visa service, which means, with Saudi co-operation, that over 90% of Saudis applying for a visa receive it on the day they apply. Or the flexibility British colleges and universities have tried to show in responding to your needs, with the UK4 undergraduate package offering a foundation year to Saudi students, and the New Route PhD combining academic with practical study.

If I speak frankly about how far the educational co-operation between our two Kingdoms falls short of what it ought to be, I do so because I believe that true friends speak the truth to each other. As the Arabic proverb says:

darb al-habib zay akl al-zabib [the blow of a dear one is like a delicious grape!].

The author of that great study "The Closing of the American Mind", Professor Allan Bloom of the University of Chicago, put it another way:

"The real community of man is the community of those who speak the truth".

Of course, Your Excellency, the real reason why I - and the accompanying delegation - are here is all of this, and none of this. The real reason is that the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, and my Prime Minister, agreed when they met in Riyadh last year to send Rammell out here to see what more could be done. And that instruction is the one we have now to implement, not just in our meetings today in Riyadh, or tomorrow in the Eastern Province, but across the Kingdom, and through the months and years ahead.

And, in doing so, in delivering this, and driving it forward, I - we - will do well always to remember, as someone once said, that:

"Great teachers don't teach, they inspire others to learn".

Your Excellency - Sheikh Khaled, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen, What have I have seen and heard so far inspires me to learn more of this special country and its special people - and of what more we educators of all kinds and both countries could and should be doing together.



#### Speech to the Eastern Province Chamber of Commerce

I had heard a lot about the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia before arriving here today.

About the huge oil and gas reserves which lie below us, of course. About the energy and enterprise for which Eastern Province people are famous. About how the Eastern Province is at once the heart and lungs of Saudi Arabia: heart because it is from here that the lifeblood of the Saudi economy is pumped - literally as well as metaphorically - through this Kingdom's vast and complex economy; and lungs because it is through the Eastern Province that the Arabs of the Peninsula have for centuries breathed the fresh air of economic engagement with the wider world.

Just as Britain has always been the gateway to Europe, so the Eastern Province is the gateway to Arabia. Except these days we should probably call it a portal.

But I am told that you are famous for something else: for saying what you think, and doing what you say. For sticking to the matter in hand, and getting on with it. The business of the Eastern Province really is business.

They say that politicians come in two types: those who want to do something; and those who want to be something.

My whole purpose in politics has been to do something. To make a difference to the lives not only of my constituents, but of the British people as a whole. So I can relate to the way you like to work.

And I hope you in turn can relate to what I have to say: that you will appreciate plain-speaking from a Government, and now a Minister, who regard themselves as true friends of Saudi Arabia.

I am not here - this huge delegation is not here - because we like the colour of your eyes, or the taste of your dates (though we do like both!). We are not here to hand out educational or any other charity to one of the richest countries on earth -