

INAUGURATION SPEECH

DR PHILIP RUSHBROOK, GOVERNOR OF ASCENSION ISLAND, ST HELENA AND TRISTAN DA CUNHA

The Right. Revd. the Lord Bishop of St Helena; Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker; Honourable Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils; the Chief Secretary and her SHG colleagues; the DFID Representative; and members of the Governor's Office, I thank you for the honour of your participation at my inauguration today as the 69th Governor. I wish to also extend my compliments to our sole member of the diplomatic corps, the Honorary French Consul, who has been a sincere friend to St Helena for, I believe, over 30 years.

It is my first official duty to thank the Sheriff of St Helena for her Welcome Address and for officiating at this impressive inauguration.

And, my second official duty is to thank each and every one of the people and organisations taking part in the parade and those in attendance today to witness this occasion.

I am deeply privileged and excited to become the Governor of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha - three unique and precious British territories in the South Atlantic. It is an honour to serve Her Majesty and to serve you. St Helena is the new home for my wife, Janis, and I and we look forward to being active members of the community on this jewel of an island.

In the last few months I have spent much of my time talking to government departments, a spectrum of organisations and businesses, and many individuals and Islanders. The purpose was to better understand their experiences and aspirations for the future. I was struck by their universal desire to see the territories develop socially and economically.

I have been fortunate too, to meet Members of the elected councils for St Helena and Ascension who attended the Joint Ministerial Council in London last December, as well as the former and current Chief Islander from Tristan da Cunha. They too, demonstrated a powerful sense of mission to build partnerships and improve the opportunities for their islands to become more prosperous and contented places in which to live and work.

I commit myself to listen to the expectations and concerns of Islanders, of elected representatives and of businesses across the territories and to encourage their endeavours and potential. Equally, I will be asking what more they will do to make the goal of economic development and greater prosperity a reality. We all recognise that the present status quo is not going to be enough to improve our lot. From what I have already heard from Islanders, many realise the uncertainties that come with change need to be resolved cordially but promptly. There are ahead of us serious conversations to be had, difficult decisions to be made and honourable compromises to find if we are to remain on track to secure our collective futures. And, we need to believe we are able to achieve the future we seek because without that no one else will.

Turning first to **St Helena**. I was pleased to see a budget support package was agreed with DFID in time for the start of the financial year. In this the UK Government is providing at present around two-thirds of the St Helena budget. We

must use this support wisely. I endorse the announcement of a multi-year capital investment programme funded by the UK, focused on the infrastructure to support economic development. Governments do not generate wealth, they create a stable platform of laws, services, infrastructure and international connections from which the initiative of commerce can thrive and diversify. To many inside St Helena and outside, none of these feel stable or modern enough yet despite significant progress in recent years. Therefore, during my tenure I will be energetically working directly with the elected representatives and SHG officers to help ensure that Saints become *Altogether Wealthier*, in line with one of the fundamental principles of 10-year economic development plan. St Helena also needs future leaders so it was extremely encouraging to meet recently around 20 students studying a multitude of subjects at universities across the UK. We must make sure they, and others returning to St Helena, are offered good prospects when they get back. Achieving better connections to the outside world through wider air access and delivering the internet potential of a marine cable will be matters receiving my constant attention.

On **Ascension**, where I note many Saints have a personal connection, the top priority is to complete the runway refurbishment as soon as possible. Without this, it will prove extremely difficult to re-establish better transport connections to the Island. Without better access, the kind of future possible for the Island will remain uncertain. On the positive side, I know there is a big push from our military colleagues to get the runway work started and do all they can to make this period of uncertainty as short as possible. The AIG administration too will continue to do all it can, in partnership with the UK and US Base Commanders, to help deliver a successful runway project. There is also a clear commitment from several quarters to help Ascension make a success of its larger Marine Protected Area, once formally designated. I intend to take a close interest with the Administrator and the AIG administration to ensure competent public services are maintained and to be resourceful in rectifying the weaknesses in the essential infrastructure. I am pleased the benefits of the additional £5 million funding from the UK last year are already being felt as critical improvements are addressed. This is a demonstrable commitment by the UK to Ascension during this period of uncertainty. There is going to be much hard work in the coming months but for the sake of the community, failure to deliver is not an option.

Tristan da Cunha, like the other islands has a fragile economy. I will be taking a special interest alongside the Island Council in supporting the population to define a pragmatic marine protection regime that both protects its pristine status whilst maintaining its ability to diversify the economy and increase income from sustainable fishing. I am pleased to learn that with 'Blue Belt' assistance the Wave Dancer, the fisheries patrol vessel, has nearly completed its refit and will soon be on its way back to Tristan waters, and the island recently took delivery of a new conservation boat and received funding for local research projects. The planning for the major RSPB/Tristan government led restoration project on the World Heritage Site of Gough Island is on track to commence next year. In April, I had the opportunity to meet the three A-level students from Tristan. They were shining examples of the energy and vitality of the next generation and wish them every success in their studies.

I reiterate today my promise, given in my announcement as the next Governor back in December, to visit Ascension and Tristan da Cunha as soon as practicable during 2019.

So, let me summarise three basic themes I see for my tenure as Governor. First, to maintain and build upon the achievements of Governor Honan and earlier governors. To serve the best interests of the peoples of the islands and promote the *loyal and unshakable* links with the UK.

Secondly, to work constructively in partnership with elected representatives, officials, businesses and communities. A partnership that focuses wholeheartedly on stimulating opportunities, viable investments and personal initiative to deliver social and economic improvements.

Thirdly, whilst I appreciate all change requires compromise and creativity, I see it is equally important we maintain the character of the heritage, natural environment and culture of our islands.

In closing, living in remote locations, necessity has often been the driver of invention and motivation. In the narrow window of opportunity we have over the next few years, to achieve a brighter future your creativity, enthusiasm and self-confidence are now required more than ever. If we are to take forward our opportunities, I look forward to working in partnership with you and UK agencies to ensure good and efficient governance; open, fair and timely decision-making; a business-friendly investment environment; building personal skills and opportunity; improvements to access and infrastructure; and the application of modern values and workable standards.

For St Helena, a rejuvenated belief in what we can achieve will encourage investors to have confidence; for Ascension, belief will help generate the strength to endure ahead of the runway being repaired; for Tristan belief will inspire continued confidence in your key markets and partners.

My heartfelt thank you for your warm welcome today.

Governor Dr Philip Rushbrook
11 May 2019