

INAUGURATION SPEECH

NIGEL PHILLIPS CBE, GOVERNOR OF ASCENSION ISLAND, ST HELENA AND TRISTAN DA CUNHA

Madam Sheriff, Chief Minister, Ministers, Councillors, Government Officers, Youth Groups, Ladies and Gentlemen – thank you for the kind words of welcome.

It is a privilege, and a humbling one at that, to swear the oath of office to serve the communities of St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha as Governor. Each of the three islands are remarkable in their own right, with extraordinary natural environments, cultures and history. I am in no doubt that it is the people who live in the three islands who are best able to judge the path ahead and I look forward to learning from you. As my mother used to say, you have two ears and one mouth: use them in that ratio. It is always sensible to listen to your mother.

In that vein, I am very well aware that the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Overseas Territories is constantly evolving. A significant example is St Helena moving to a ministerial system of government. I wish now to congratulate you on what is a major development in your governance model. As your Governor, I will unreservedly champion this new approach, working with Ministers and all elected Members to ensure it becomes a success.

Understanding the reality of the life people lead is fundamental. I have learnt previously that communities who live in remote locations are both resilient and resourceful. They are accustomed to adapting to uncertainty. Yet the sense of uncertainty currently seems to be especially acute. Just as we emerge from the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the world now faces the economic turmoil triggered by events in Ukraine and beyond. Only by working together can we hope to meet the challenges. I am committed to working in partnership with the elected representatives and public services of the three administrations and the UK to deliver the best possible outcomes for our islands. Whether they be government or voluntary groups, I will lend my support to those helping to educate, protect, develop and care for everyone who calls this remarkable territory home. I am equally interested in supporting those in the business sector seeking to diversify the economy, building the resilience necessary to weather future shocks. And it will be a pleasure to cooperate with the NGOs who do such vital work across all the islands.

As I have prepared for this appointment, I am struck by the extraordinary ambition that exists across all the islands to enable the environment to thrive. We all know that a healthy natural environment is inextricably linked with the ability to prosper as people and effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century. Whilst each may be small, your respective governments have already shown they want to move forward and I want to help you achieve your respective goals. It is not an impossible dream. Each island has so much to offer. Indeed, collectively you have made world-leading steps in marine and terrestrial conservation, demonstrating beyond doubt just how much is possible.

Effective teamwork is vital to success and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the public service and health services here, and on Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, along with the Governor's Office and Administrator teams for their unfailing support in addressing the impacts of the pandemic. Their efforts to support elected representatives in protecting and supporting our communities during this extraordinary era has been above and beyond. I look forward to helping build on the firm foundations that have been laid.

More personally, Emma and I have not before visited any of the three islands, but I do feel we know a little about St Helena thanks to the Saints community in the Falklands and the unique nature of small Island communities. I can say only that we relish the opportunity to make this our home for the duration of our tenure. We know of the friendliness that typifies this community and we want to play our part. Let me also be clear that I absolutely want to visit Ascension and Tristan da Cunha as soon as I am able. I know COVID stymied many plans, but hopefully there is now an opportunity to travel a little more easily.

Having learnt the best speeches are short, I will draw my comments to an end. Let me finish by reiterating my determination to listen to as many people as possible to understand properly not only the issues and challenges you face in these uncertain times, but also your hopes and dreams. To live in such wonderful places gives good cause to be aspirational.

Thank you again for the words of welcome. I cannot wait to get started.

Governor Nigel Phillips CBE
13 August 2022