

## Chairman's Speech Annual Dinner 2012

Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the Bahrain Society Dinner for 2012.

In particular I would like to welcome His Excellency Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed al Khalifa, the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Lord Astor of Hever, Under Secretary of State for Defence, both of whom have agreed to address us in a few minutes time.

Sheikh Khalid is well known to many of us as an ex Ambassador of the Kingdom in London and hence a Vice President of the Society. I first met Sheikh Khalid many years ago at a lunch at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst where we seemed to get on well together but where neither of us, I suspect quite knew why we were there !

Lord Astor is an excellent friend of Bahrain and it is good to know that the Kingdom has such a friend in the upper echelons of Government.

The Society has had a good year with seven gatherings of one sort or another. The highlights were definitely the Reception kindly hosted by Her Excellency the Bahrain Ambassador in June and, I think, the visit we paid to the All England Lawn Tennis Club at Wimbledon. I shall view the Wimbledon championships with new and more knowledgeable eyes in future.

At the beginning of October a party of Members went to Bahrain for a week where we were splendidly looked after by the Foreign Ministry. Numbers going were down this year compared to previous visits, which was I think due to two things. First, the general economic situation does not lend itself to us old folks lashing out on expensive travel, and secondly, to concerns about the security situation in Bahrain. I had said quite clearly during the planning stage that security would not be a problem. And so it proved. We saw no signs of trouble during our week. We were lucky enough to have audiences with His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, two Deputy Prime Ministers and several other ministers. I was honoured with a private audience with His Majesty, our Patron, who was fulsome with his praise for the Society.

Those regular attendees at our Dinner will have noted the change of venue. Even this hotel is struggling with the numbers we have here and it is a great tribute to His Excellency Sheikh Khalid that so many people want to see him and re-establish old friendships.

May I please mention again the Kingdom's Ambassador, Her Excellency Alice Samaan. She has been in London now for a bit over a year and is a full and active member of the Diplomatic community, as well as being of enormous help to me and to the Society. Thank you, Alice, for all that you do for us.

May I couple this with welcoming this evening our Ambassador to Bahrain, Mr Iain Lindsay. Iain came to the Kingdom from Hong Kong and other postings in the Far East. However, he

has taken to Bahrain as a duck to water and I hope he and his family are happy there.

Even though we are an entirely non-political organisation I feel I must dwell for a few moments longer on the security of the country we all admire so much. The unfortunate unrest of early last year has definitely left increased tensions within the population. I think it was brave of His Majesty to commission the report produced by Mr Bassouni and his respected and international colleagues. The way it has been accepted and the speed that nearly all its recommendations are being put into effect reflect great credit on the whole government of Bahrain. It lays down clearly the pathway for the future and if only the neighbours across the Gulf would stop their meddling, that settled future would arrive even more quickly.

Those of you who were present at the first dinner after I became Chairman may remember I said I would not be able to function if our excellent Honorary Secretary, Mr Vic Whittingham, retired during my tenure of office. Echoing Mr Chamberlain, I have to tell you now that the worst has happened and Vic has decided he has had enough. He therefore intends to step down at the Annual General meeting in January.

I cannot praise enough Vic's efforts on behalf of the Society. He has been tireless in keeping the Society running and his knowledge and advice have been invaluable to me, to the Committee and to the Society as a whole. Vic you always hide yourself away on these occasions and refuse to sit in a prominent position. So this time I am going to defeat you. Please stand up and take a very well deserved round of applause. Thank you for all that you have done.

I am pleased to say that Mrs Laurel Winter has agreed to take over the Secretarial responsibilities. Laurel has lived in Bahrain for many years and will, I am sure, become another tower of strength.

We have decided to split the tasks to make life easier for Laurel and so I am also pleased to be able to say that Mr Stuart Read has agreed that he will take over membership tasks and will also compose our Newsletter.