

Bahrain Society Dinner 16th November 2009 - Chairman's Speech

Your Excellencies, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen

As your Committee received no adverse comments on the venue for our dinner after last year we are back in the Army and Navy Club! It is good to see so many members here and I most sincerely welcome all our guests.

We have the honour this evening to have with us a senior Minister from Bahrain and an ex senior Secretary of State from the United Kingdom.

His Excellency General Sheikh Rashed bin Abdullah al Khalifa is the Minister of the Interior of Bahrain. It is his awesome responsibility to see that the Kingdom runs smoothly and peacefully and that the police do all that is required of them. On my recent visits I can vouch for his success. But then he is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, so one expects nothing less !

The Right Honourable Dr John Reid MP who was previously Secretary of State for Defence and later Home Secretary, thus he was then Sheikh Rashed's exact opposite number. I understand he and Sheikh Rashed met several times then and so it is a happy coincidence that the Society is able to bring them together again here this evening

It is now almost unbelievably 10 years since His Majesty King Hamed, the Society's Patron, succeeded his illustrious father, Sheikh Isa, and we have all watched with pride how his Kingdom has developed and, indeed, even expanded geographically during his reign. I ask Sheikh Rashed to convey the congratulations and best wishes of the whole Society for His Majesty's continued success.

I was privileged to visit Bahrain in July to help with the training of Sheikh Rashed's mounted police and I was able at the same time, as your Chairman, to call on a number of senior Bahrainis who all spoke fondly of the Society.

In particular, I would like to mention Mr Hussein Yateem, who will be well known to many of you. He has been a stalwart supporter of the Society for many years, and although now well over 90, he received me in his office most graciously.

I would like to brief you on two matters which prove conclusively how Bahrain values our Society and is not slow to ask for our support when suitable and necessary.

First, Bahrain Television has been here recently making a programme entitled "Memories of Bahrain". Indeed several people here have been interviewed for it and it is turning out to be a fascinating programme. I hope we may be able to acquire some of the copy to show at a future meeting. They specifically asked that the Society be instrumental in choosing those to be interviewed. You will have seen their camera team in the hall before dinner getting a flavour of the Society's main event of the year.

Secondly, the Society was asked by the Ministry of Information in Bahrain to organise a seminar on the 10th of November in the House of Lords. Three senior Bahrainis spoke on such subjects as democracy, the place of women in a modern society, freedom of the media and human rights. The invited audience consisted of members of the Lords and Commons, guests of the Bahrain

Ambassador and 25 members of the Society. With the considerable help of the Embassy staff it was a great success.

May I again this year mention Dr Omar al Hassan's Gulf Centre of Strategic Studies, which works tirelessly to improve Bahrain/British relations and to assist Bahrain in general. Dr Omar is a great supporter of the Society.

Again I must pay tribute to our Secretary, Mr Vic Whittingham, without whose splendid efforts the Society would surely collapse. He has the support, of course, of your Committee and I thank them for all that they do. However, I fear we are an ancient and long serving bunch and we need new blood.

Please, I ask for volunteers.

I would like on, I am sure, behalf of you all, to thank the whole staff of the Army and Navy Club who have provided us with a most excellent meal and looked after us so well.

His Excellency Sheikh Rashed obviously liked the look of my Club because he has asked to join ! I have spoken to the Club Chairman who has agreed that if I propose the Minister he will second him, so there is little doubt that he will be accepted!

Lastly, may I please on your behalf thank most sincerely The Bahrain Ambassador to the Court of St James's, Sheikh Khalifa bin Ali al Khalifa, who does so much for us and supports us in so many ways. Thank you, Sir.

May I now ask you to rise for the loyal toasts:

Her Majesty the Queen

His Majesty King Hamed bin Isa al Khalifa