

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
JOINT MINISTERIAL COUNCIL 2021
THE HONOURABLE PREMIER
26TH NOVEMBER 2021

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will be aware of the annual trek to London made by the heads of government of the Overseas Territories to conduct meetings with the Ministers of the UK Government on those issues that impact the peoples of the remaining British colonies.

Mr. Speaker, following last year's virtual meeting I am pleased to advise Honourable Members that I attended the Joint Ministerial Council - or JMC as it is known, for in person meetings this year and was pleased to have been joined by colleague Premiers from other Overseas Territories.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda currently serves as the Chair of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association or UKOTA as such I was pleased to chair a meeting of the UKOTA political council as a preface to the JMC and during which leaders had the opportunity to crystallise those issues on which we would present a united and settled position to the UK Government. Unsurprisingly, Mr. Speaker, there were common experiences shared with respect to the global pandemic and the impact of the coronavirus on our economies.

Mr. Speaker, the meeting of the JMC consisted of a series of session on a variety of issues and at which were present UK Ministers to lead discussions to the benefit of the OTs. These sessions included:

- Environment and Oceans led by Lord Goldsmith
- IMO II Code led by Minister Courts and the UK's Permanent Representative to the IMO, Katy Ware
- The relationship b/w the United States and the Overseas Territories
- Economic resilience
- Law Enforcement
- Health issues (COVID-19 & Mental Health) led by Minister Argar and Ian Cumming, NHS Ambassador for the Overseas Territories

Mr. Speaker, the sessions were informative and afforded an opportunity to directly address those UK Ministers and officials charged with policy making and implementation which have direct effect on the Overseas Territories and specifically Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will no doubt recall the tragic death of Sir David Amess the MP for Southend and Chairman of the Bermuda All-Parliamentary Group. I had the opportunity in the company of the Speaker of the House of Commons to lay a wreath in his memory and on behalf of the Government and people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, following the recent changes in ministerial appointments in the UK, the Minister of State for the Overseas Territories is Amanda Milling MP. Honourable Members will have seen the media coverage of my meeting with her and the issue we discussed. Mr. Speaker, I would reiterate for this Honourable House that I took the opportunity to clearly set out the position of the Government of Bermuda on the grant of Assent to Bills properly passed by the Legislature.

Whilst it may well be a convenient political point for Honourable Members opposite to make this about cannabis and that legislation, Mr. Speaker, this is a matter of principle. Bermuda's Constitution is an advanced one and one adopted as pre-cursor to self-determination. It is the well honoured convention under that Constitution that Bills passed in the Legislature will not be denied the Assent of the Governor and as I indicated to Minister Milling, that is our expectation with respect to the legislation on cannabis. Mr. Speaker, this stance is a necessary one because today, it may be a regulated cannabis industry, tomorrow it may well be banking. The Government cannot acquiesce to the delay or denial of those initiatives that will economically empower the people of this country and provide the access to capital that has been historically out of reach for so many.

Mr. Speaker, in the wake of Brexit and the UK's drift away from constructive EU engagement, Bermuda has been left to its own devices to ensure that our interest is safeguarded in key political centres like Brussels. Following the JMC I took the opportunity to support the Minister of Finance in bolstering Bermuda's reputation within the European institutions and to meet with broader government and industry stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, I met with William Macfarlane, Director, Economics and Trade at the UK Mission to the EU and discussed the UK-EU and Bermuda-EU relationships post-Brexit as well as areas where Bermuda and the UK Mission to the EU could deepen connections. This included in the important areas of vaccination certificate equivalence and EU mobility, climate change and follow-up from COP26, and financial services.

In addition to meeting with EU policymakers, it is crucial to meet with those whose research and analysis informs those decision makers. I also met with one of the foremost thought-leaders in Brussels, Karel Lannoo, CEO of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS). CEPS is among the most influential European think tanks, and among the top ten think tanks in the world. In addition to producing first-hand research and analysis on EU proposals and regulations of importance to Bermuda, Mr Lannoo is also a regular speaker in hearings for national and international institutions, and in public and closed-door meetings with high-level actors. Mr. Speaker, this was an opportunity to discuss Bermuda's broader interests vis-à-vis the European Union, ranging from financial services and Solvency II to innovations within Bermuda's digital assets and renewable energy sectors. This meeting helped identify potential synergies with CEPS and areas for future cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, I also attended and delivered a keynote speech at a dinner with government and industry partners based in Brussels, organised by the Government of Bermuda Brussels Office and British Chamber of Commerce – EU and Belgium. Engagements such as this create multipliers for positive messaging about Bermuda and ensure that thought-leaders and key stakeholders are well informed about the opportunities to do business on the island.

Mr. Speaker, no visit to the UK is complete without engaging with Bermudian students who are living and working in England. Two events styled as "Dinner and Dialogue with the Premier" were hosted in London and Manchester. Mr. Speaker, it is inspiring to share an evening with the diverse and talented women and men who are committed to their education and in most cases to returning to Bermuda to contribute their native land.

Mr. Speaker, this marks my fourth and most consequential JMC. The urgency that surrounds issues like the impact of climate change on Overseas Territories and the economic impact of the pandemic on such small Island states provided a stark backdrop to the meetings and underscored the ongoing need for Regional cooperation. In the 20 months since the declaration of the global pandemic the world has seen the introduction of a global minimum corporate tax and a definitive shift in the approach of the G20 countries to those of us who make our living in the area of financial services. The direct engagement and the importance of safeguarding Bermuda's interests on the UK and EU stages has taken on new significance as the world seeks to move beyond the pandemic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.