

Saudi Arabia

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UNCLASSIFIED
FM JEDDA 290650Z MAY
TO PRIORITY FCO
TELNO 419 OF 29 MAY 88

Prime Minister

MA 30/✓

AND TO PRIORITY DOT CREDA

MIPT; ANGLO - SAUDI TRADE

1. FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF ON THE RECORD STATEMENT
MADE BY MR JONATHAN AIKEN MP CHAIRMAN OF THE BRISITH
SAUDI ARABIAN PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP GROUP
TO A GROUP OF BRITISH BUSINESSMEN IN RIYADH ON 28 MAY

ms

BEGINS

RECENT COMMENTS IN THE WESTERN MEDIA ABOUT SAUDI ARABI, PARTICULARLY
ON TELEVISION, IN THE LONDON TIMES AND IN THE NEW YORK TIMES
HAVE CONTAINED A MULTITUDE OF INACCURACIES, DISTORTIONS AND
UNFAIR JUDGEMENTS.

PERHAPS THE TIME HAS COME FOR SAUDI ARABIA'S FRIENDS TO SPEAK OUT
TO SET THE RECORD STRAIGHT. FOR IT IS IN NOBODY'S INTEREST
TO PERMIT OUR TRADITIONAL LIBERTY OF EXPRESSION TO DECLINE
INTO A LICENCE TO DENIGRATE. AND WHEN THE OBJECT OF THE
DENIGRATION IS A FRIENDLY COUNTRY WHICH HAS PROVED ITSELF
TO BE A WISE AND MODERATE LEADER OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD AS WELL
AS THE WEST'S STAUNCHEST ALLY IN THIS AREA, THEN THE NEED
TO CORRECT MISINFORMATION IS ALL THE GREATER.

THOSE WHO LIVE AND WORK IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA SURELY
HAVE A BETTER APPRECIATION OF THE SITUATION HERE THAN
VISITING REPORTERS, WHO ALL TOO OFTEN IN RECENT MONTHS
SEEM TO HAVE HAD PERSONAL AXES TO GRIND.
HAVING MYSELF FIRST TRAVELLED TO THIS COUNTRY IN 1968, AND
HAVING MANY SAUDI FRIENDS HERE, PARTICULARLY IN THE LAST
FIVE YEARS, I AM SURE I SPEAK FOR MOST OF YOU WHEN I EXPRESS MY
STRONG DISAGREEMENT WITH THOSE ELEMENTS IN THE MEDIA WHICH PROMOTE
A PESSIMISTIC OR EVEN HOSTILE VIEW OF SAUDI ARABIA.

/AS I SEE

AS I SEE IT, THIS IS BY ANY STANDARDS A PROSPEROUS AND SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY. IT HAS SO FAR AVOIDED MANY OF THE SICKNESSES THAT INFLECT WESTERN SOCIETIES, SUCH AS SERIOUS CRIME. IT LOOKS AFTER THE WEFARE OF ITS PCOREST CITIZENS FAR BETTER THAN ANY SOCIALIST UTOPIA COULD EVER HOPE TO. IT HAS A STRONG GOVERNMENT LED BY A CAPABLE AND POPULAR ROYAL FAMILY. AND IT HAS BEEN A LOYAL AND DEPENDABLE ALLY TO THE WEST.

OF COURSE , SAUDI ARABIA HAS ITS FAULTS TOO. NO NATION DEVELOPING AT SUCH SPEED CAN AVOID PROBLEMS. BUT TAKAIG THE BROAD VIEW, THE DEVELOPMENT OF SAUDI ARABIA IS A SUCCESS STORY WHICH DESERVES MUCH FAIRER REPORTING FROM MEDIA THAN IT HAS HAD RECENTLY.

AS FRJ THE FUTURE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND SAUDI ARABIA, IT WOULD BE A TRAGEDY IF TWO GREAT KINGDOMS WERE TO BECOME SERIOUSLY ESTRANGED AS A RESULT OF ONE MAVERICK TELEVISION PROGRAMME. LESSONS HAVE NOW BEEN LEARNED FROM THIS SAD AFFAIR. APOLOGIES HAVE BEEN SINCERELY OFFERED, BOTH AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS AND BY MANY INDIVIDUALS WHO CHERISH THEIR SAUDI FRIENDSHIPS. I HOPE THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION MAY NOW BEGIN WITHOUT DELAY BEFORE ANY PERMANENT MUTUAL DAMAGE OCCURS.

ENDS

GRAY

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