



## UK special trade envoy seeks to strengthen Philippine-British bilateral relations

Last 17 June 2014, the Philippine-British Business Council (PBBC) held a Special Membership Meeting, on the occasion of the visit of the newly-appointed Special Trade Envoy of the United Kingdom to the Philippines, George Freeman, Member of Parliament (MP) for Mid-Norfolk. Also at the PBBC membership meeting to welcome Mr. Freeman were PEZA Director General and Trade Undersecretary Lilia B. de Lima, Finance Undersecretary Gil S. Beltran, Makati Business Club Chairman Ramon R. del Rosario, Jr., British Ambassador to the Philippines Asif A. Ahmad, and British Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines Chairman Roger Lamb.



George Freeman MP is one of the 14 envoys recently appointed by British Prime Minister David Cameron to select high-growth and developing markets in the world. Mr. Freeman is the first Special Trade Envoy the British Government has appointed specifically for the Philippines. As part of his first visit to the country, he has specifically requested to meet with the PBBC and its members to gain an overview of doing business in the Philippines, and to better understand the dynamics of British and Philippine commercial relations.

In his welcome remarks, PBBC Co-Chairman Ambassador Jesus Tambunting emphasized how this development is "seen as a demonstration of the [United Kingdom's] strong confidence in the growth of the Philippine economy." He further stresses how the appointment of a Special Trade Envoy to the Philippines "signals a new turn in Philippine-British trade relations" and underscores the latter's intentions and commitment to deepening existing trade ties and linkages. Ambassador Ahmad confirms this by addressing how Mr. Freeman's appointment as Special Trade Envoy is "indicative of a genuine interest" the UK has in the Philippines.

Bringing along with him greetings from British Prime Minister David Cameron and Foreign Minister William Hague, Mr. Freeman regards himself as a "very personal statement from the British Government's commitment to the Philippine market, and to keep the [UK-Philippines] trade flame alive." He welcomes his new appointment, commenting how the already-strong historic relationship between the two countries would play an important role in the strategic fulfillment of his objectives as trade envoy.

He sees the Philippines as a rapidly-developing country; evolving into a globally-respected open market platform "right in the middle of a very exciting Pacific region." In Mr. Freeman's brief stay in the Philippine he has observed how the country has quickly positioned itself to be the jumping off-point into the wider [ASEAN] regional market. With the steady annual growth of UK investments in the Philippines, Freeman is confident that more British companies will follow suit in the next few years.

Mr. Freeman was elected to Parliament in 2010 after fifteen years in the field of biomedical venture capital. He was closely involved in the development of the Life Science Industrial Strategy and the Agri-Tech Industrial Strategy for the British Government. He is a frequent contributor to British press, focusing on the need for entrepreneurial renaissance, for the creation of a true Innovation Economy and the opportunity of emerging markets for UK exports. ■

A quarterly publication of the Philippine-British Business Council, the **PBBC Newsletter** provides the latest socio-economic updates, as well as news on developments in trade and investments between the two countries.

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## SPECIAL FEATURE: Asia House

Asia House, the London-based centre of expertise on Asia and the United Kingdom's leading pan-Asian organization, has been actively working with the Philippines in recent months as part of its mission to connect the UK and Asia. Asia House Chief Executive Michael Lawrence was in Manila last month to meet with Philippine political and business leaders to strengthen the relationship with the Philippines, and to invite decision-makers and influencers to use the unique facility that Asia House provides.

Through its extensive network of contacts and its pioneering events on business, policy and politics and culture, Asia House is able to shape and nurture the expanding, promising commercial relationship between the UK and Asia. It serves as an independent and objective forum for discussion and debate, leveraging its extensive network of business leaders and policy makers across Asia.

The primary mission of Asia House is to connect Asia and the UK: to engage and inform; to facilitate trade and commerce; and to encourage frank dialogue to provide insight and understanding. Asia House also serves as a landing and launch pad for Asian companies moving into the UK and Europe, giving them a platform from which to engage and interface with key business and policy figures.

Last July, Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima was the guest of honor at a private lunch meeting with Asia House senior corporate members in London. The roundtable discussion, which comprised representatives from prominent British companies—including HSBC, Prudential, Standard Chartered, Jardine Matheson, GlaxoSmithKline, Diageo, and Arup—followed the enormously successful "Invest Philippines" Conference in October 2013.

"Invest Philippines" attracted a large audience, and has helped elevate the understanding of the Philippines and the opportunities it offers, among the British investing community. Secretary Purisima was part of the Philippine official delegation, which also included Trade Secretary Gregory Domingo, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Center Executive Director Cosette Canilao, and Deputy Central Bank Governor Diwa Guinigundo.

Some of the world's leading multinational companies are members of Asia House. They include the founding stakeholders HSBC, Prudential, and Standard Chartered, along with KPMG, Linklaters LLP, BP (British Petroleum), McKinsey & Company, The International Bank of Azerbaijan, ANZ, Dia-

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Images courtesy of Asia Society

geo, Telstra, The Financial Times, Heathrow, Tesco and Rio Tinto—just to name a few.

Asia House's program ranges from private briefings for corporate members to public conferences and networking receptions. It also has a vibrant cultural program, which includes the Asia House Film Festival and the Asia House Bagri Foundation Literature Festival.

Recent speakers at Asia House events include K Shanmugam, Singapore Foreign Minister; Vince Cable, UK Secretary for Business; Tsang Chun Wah, Hong Kong Financial Secretary; Paul Manduca, Chairman of Prudential; John Key, Prime Minister of New Zealand; Sir Henry Keswick, Chairman of Jardine Matheson; Hugo Swire, UK Foreign Office Minister; Dr. Lim Hong Hin, ASEAN Deputy Secretary General; David Thodey, CEO of Telstra; Dr. Harsha Singh, WTO Deputy Director General; and Vũ Văn Ninh, Deputy Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

One of Asia House's upcoming key events is the presentation of the Asia House Asian Business Leaders Award, which this year will be formally awarded to Ms. Ho Ching, Executive Director and Chief Executive of Temasek. The annual Asia House award recognizes individuals who embody economic success and professional excellence, accompanied by moral leadership and service to society. Previous winners include Mr. Ratan Tata, GBE (Chairman Emeritus, Tata Sons), Mr. Azim Premji (Chairman, Wipro Limited), Mr. Jack Ma (Executive Chairman, Alibaba Group), and Ms. Lubna Olayan (CEO, Olayan Financing Company).

Through the Philippine-British Business Council and the Makati Business Club, Asia House is quite keen to deepen its understanding of the Philippine business environment, as well as to cultivate deeper linkages with its business community. ■

## Join the Philippine-British Business Council!

The PBBC was established in 1995 to promote trade and investments between the Philippines and the United Kingdom. The council is composed of top business executives who seek to explore business opportunities between the two countries and to promote the exchange of views on policies of mutual concern. The Makati Business Club serves as the secretariat of the PBBC.

For membership inquiries, contact Ms. Maria Victoria Sibal, PBBC Coordinator at (+63 2) 751-1143 or send an email to [v.sibal@mbc.com.ph](mailto:v.sibal@mbc.com.ph) or [mbc.businesscouncils@gmail.com](mailto:mbc.businesscouncils@gmail.com)