

Former 42nd US President William Jefferson Clinton

Dinner at the Jumeirah Carlton Tower, December 2, 2005

The evening of Friday 2 December 2005 was very special for the Chamber. About 365 members of the Canadian community in the UK and their guests filled the ballroom of the Jumeirah Carlton Tower hotel in Central London. There was a lot of excitement and anticipation in the air and a thunderous applause broke out when former US President William Jefferson Clinton arrived in the Ballroom after posing for pictures with around 50 VIP guests.

Victor Phillip Dahdaleh, President of the Canada-UK Chamber of Commerce and Board Trustee of the William J. Clinton Foundation, warmly welcomed President Bill Clinton; The Right Honourable Kim Campbell, former Prime Minister of Canada; His Excellency the High Commissioner for Canada Mel Cappe and distinguished guests and members of the Canadian community in the UK. Noting that the President's achievements as the 42nd US President are well-known, Victor Dahdaleh highlighted how President Clinton has made a difference around the world during the past 5 years since he left the White House. He cited in particular the establishment of the William J Clinton Foundation which has helped HIV Aids victims worldwide, as well as the victims of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katerina; the opening of the Clinton Presidential Library which has broken all attendance records; the writing of a best seller, his memoirs; and the Clinton Global Initiative which was inaugurated in New York in September 2005 and brought together 1,000 world leaders and activists, resulting in pledges of over 2 billion US dollars in individual commitments for combating poverty, promoting good governance, reversing climate change and promoting religious reconciliation.

To much laughter from the audience, Victor Dahdaleh ended by congratulating President Clinton on his recovery from a quadruple by-pass surgery and an anecdote on the latter's admirable physical fitness.

In a most thought-provoking address, President Clinton stressed his great indebtedness to and admiration for 2 great nations: Canada and the United Kingdom, with whom he had worked very closely as President. He pointed out that Canadians should be proud of former Prime Minister Kim Campbell's work with the Club of Madrid, which supports democratic governments around the world. Reflecting on a global world, he warned that we still face an uncertain and unstable future in this interdependent world. He stressed that it is the very diversity of the audience -which reflects the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the US, Canada and the UK -which makes them vulnerable to the alienated and disenfranchised who live in their midst. He raised such issues as how we deal with the threat of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction

(WMD); how we deal with world poverty where half the people live on 2 US dollars a day and have no access to clean water; and how we deal with global warming and imposing constraints to balance a good environment with a good economy. He stressed that answers have to be found for these issues if we wanted our children and grandchildren to inherit the physical and financial security that we enjoy.

Suggesting some answers to the questions posed above, he praised the behind-the-scenes work carried out by intelligence agencies both in the East and West to prevent terrorism and destroy stocks of WMD. On Iraq, he maintained that while he was against the war he believes we must all route for this enterprise to succeed and that there is still a chance that it will work.

Failing this, Iraq will split apart and become a terrorist haven as the recent bombings in Jordan demonstrate. He noted the positive signs emerging from Iraq of 58% of voters risking their lives to vote, a relatively high percentage, particularly considering that the Sunnis did not cast their votes. He vehemently 'opposed troop withdrawal till after the elections, underlining the need for the United States and Britain 'to use their moral suasion to cut a deal' and to set up a timetable for withdrawal next year 'because the Sunnis, the Shiites and the Kurds all agree that they want the withdrawal of all foreign troops'. Expressing his fear for the situation in Afghanistan, he noted 'we did not do it right', pointing out that it was a mistake not to finish the job in Afghanistan and devote more effort to keeping the Karzai government in a better position in the face of the threat of a Taliban revival, the continuing presence of Al-Qaeda recruits and the resumption of the opium trade by the war lords with all the repercussions that this threat poses in the fight of the US and Europe against the drug trade. He said he was 'opposed to the violation of the Geneva conventions' and that 'because we are engaged in the fight against terror we should not legitimize torture'.

President Clinton warned that security policies will still fail if they are not accompanied by other measures like fighting Aids and poverty and giving alienated people a better start in life and including them in our future. He said "we know how to do this and we had success after success after success in 2000'. Citing examples of disaster hit areas like Indonesia, the largest Muslim country and Pakistan, 'where people who are ethnically close to the Taliban traditionally hate the United States and Britain', he pointed out that following the West's help and hands -on assistance, 'the hate is beginning to be chipped away because we related to them as human beings, not for political reasons'. He stressed that the 'fundamental problem we have is to create jobs and still preserve our social fabric'. He proposed what he termed a 'radical idea' of dealing with climate change while creating new high wage jobs and preserving the social fabric, citing the possibility of generating millions of jobs in

Europe, Canada, the US and Japan by moving towards an energy conservation future, cutting the cost of generating electricity and resorting to wind and solar energy in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

He ended his inspiring address on an optimistic note by exhorting the audience not to be short sighted and to keep in mind 'the half of the World that feels left out'. He emphasized that 'the power of all private citizens to do public good is greater now than ever before in human history' and urged the Canada-UK Chamber to continue 'to nourish the relationship between Canada and the UK' . Following a standing ovation, The Right Honourable Kim Campbell gave a most eloquent Vote of Thanks to President Clinton, 'who has been a great friend to Canada'. Applauding his statesmanship and his curiosity and willingness to listen, she pointed out that this 'policy wonk' was caring and wanted answers to questions; that he has taken his high profile, 'his extraordinary treasure of knowledge' and contacts gained in the highest office to continue his fight; that post presidency he has used all the resources he has to bring together those who can make a difference and to challenge them to make a difference. She lauded his generosity of spirit and said that the best thanks the audience can give him is to go away and act on the challenges he has posed for us. The success of this memorable evening culminated in the Chamber's substantial donation of £8000 from the proceeds of the evening for a charitable cause that is very close to the hearts of Canadians in the UK: The Maple Leaf Trust, the premier charity of the Canadian community.

