

## Farewell HMA Tom Fletcher from the BLBG.

On Tuesday, members of the British Lebanese Business Group (BLBG) gathered together for an address by the outgoing UK Ambassador to Lebanon, Tom Fletcher.

One of Lebanon's top ten banks, Credit Libanais, generously offered to host the gathering in the sumptuous suite on the 29<sup>th</sup> floor of their new headquarters building: a glass enclosed terrace afforded wonderful views of Beirut stretching out into the Mediterranean in the evening sunlight. Chateau Bell-Vue had donated cases of two of their wines for the occasion. Many thanks to both organisations.

HMA Fletcher was introduced by showing a [short video](#) of his recent "saying good bye to Lebanon" walking (yes, walking) trip of about 100 kilometers from Hamat in the North, along the coast down to Beirut. It looked like a lot of fun with plenty of sampling of local produce, as well as touring the container terminal in a fork lift and visiting different points of interest. An imaginative and unique way of raising his hat in farewell to a country he has come to love.



A short address was followed by a lively and extended Q&A session. His Excellency reminded us that on his first meeting with the group, it had asked him to "fly the flag and we'll do the business"; a combination that has resulted in British exports to Lebanon doubling to over half a billion pounds Sterling annually. His embassy have certainly flown the flag with the return of British Airways, arrival of Marks & Spencer and many, many other British brands gracing the malls of Lebanon. And then there was Great British week and the initiation of annual Business awards.

Many of the questions probed Tom's view of the future and he remains fiercely optimistic for Lebanon. In support of that view he cited the potential presented by the offshore gas field, coping with the Syrian crisis and its attendant influx of refugees, coping with the presidential vacuum and the attendant government torpidity, coping with the issues of electricity shortages and indeed the Lebanese amazing capacity for coping. He explained that he believes that Lebanon's future should and must be in Lebanese hands and has urged political leaders to listening less to the advice and wishes of foreign governments and more to the wishes of the Lebanese people. It remains his hope that evolution will prevail and that his vision of Lebanon 2020 is achievable, if not necessarily by that date. Many of those views are developed further [on his blog](#).



The evening was closed with the BLBG presenting HMA Fletcher with an engraved box of locally made cheese serving knives.

Tom, the BLBG thanks you unreservedly for your support and wishes you and your family all you wish for from the future.

Graham Ball, BLBG Chairman.