

**Opening and concluding remarks by Rt Hon Tom Brake MP, LibDem Foreign Affairs spokesperson, at the National Launch of the Balfour Project's film 'Britain in Palestine 1917-1948' on 19<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in the Attlee Room, Portcullis House, Westminster.**

**Opening remarks:**

'I am pleased to be able to host this event and to see a number of Parliamentary colleagues from different parties here today: Mike Gapes MP, who is on the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Grahame Morris MP, Jeff Smith MP, and Andy Slaughter MP.

'Ian Murray MP [one of the other sponsors] sent his apologies. I quote: *"I am sorry I am unable to be with you this evening. I was delighted to sponsor this event as I have been in touch with Professor and Dr Spooner from my constituency over a number of years in their quest to educate the public and politicians on the consequences of the Balfour Declaration, and the consequences of Western interventions in the Middle East and wider region over the past few centuries. It is critical work to try and understand the forced histories of the countries in the region that influences the way politics and society works today."*

'Before I hand over to our Chair, I just want to say why I wanted to sponsor the event along with colleagues from other parties. Maybe 10 years ago, Peter Riddell from Initiatives of Change organised for a group of Palestinians to come to Westminster. During the course of my discussion with them, I found them a little aggressive towards me, and I wondered what was behind it. I realised that what they were aggressive about was the decisions that my great-grandfather might have been involved with. That was the first time I had come face to face with people who felt that the decisions we had taken nearly a century ago have led to very significant difficulties not only in relation to Palestine, but also to Syria and Iraq. That is why I wanted to sponsor this event. Now we have the centenary of the Balfour Declaration coming up next year, and clearly there are some strong views about the way in which it should be commemorated. Some may use the word 'celebrate'; others may have other words they would like to use. When we have seen the film, we will have the opportunity to discuss how in fact we can ensure that this is recognised.

'One thing I am aware of is that there are many aspects of our past which are not actually covered at all in the school curriculum, whether it is the Balfour Declaration, the Sykes-Picot Agreement or, to bring it more up to date, the European Union. This is something that we do need to address.'

**Concluding remarks**

One of the interventions this evening said we should concentrate on the future. Clearly the Balfour Project aims to make people aware of the past - but raking over the past alone will not lead to what we are all trying to achieve. Sir Vincent said that we are way behind the French in terms of [the recognition of Palestine as a state]. Ensuring the UK Government plays a significant role in promoting peace in the region

in the Balfour Declaration's centenary year must be part of that. Regarding the recognition of Palestine, we have had government ministers indicating that they are poised to do this. I think the most recent comments are along the lines of 'We are waiting for it to have maximum effect'. So I am hoping that by working with the French we might actually get a joint announcement and I think that would help move things forward in a positive way.

I am very happy to remain involved, and as I said there were five parliamentarians here, so you have certainly got a kernel who I am sure will want to work with you to [promote](#) this agenda.