

Press release for immediate use

30th October 2013

BORIS JOHNSON SPARKS DEBATE AT 9th ISLAMIC ECONOMIC FORUM

Day two of the 9th WIEF opened with a thought provoking conversation between Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, and Lauren Taylor, a presenter for Al Jazeera English in a session on Smart Cities and what this means for the future.

Opening a day of talks on the theme of Smart Economies, Mr Johnson spoke briefly on the historical growth of London and its development from a 'ruin' to the 'best city in the world' being based on Islamic interaction in the 8th century during the reign of King Offa (of Mercia).

"Who? Offa, King Offa...He knew his people would flourish by trade with people in the Muslim world...and indeed it was that Muslim world in that period of the middle ages that preserved so many of the glories of western civilization...I want to renew the offer of Offa, Offa's offer I make again. Let's build up trade, let's build up co-operation, and let's do it in a city that I'd like to think has grown considerably since the time of Offa"

Following the speech, Mr Johnson held a question and answer session, in which several topics were discussed:

Islamic Finance:

"It's very important that London should be a strong Islamic financial centre – and it's clearly going to be of great benefit to those who need shariah compliant loans and mortgages. But above all it enables us to go ahead with the financing of quite stupendous projects."

Halal Food:

"Delighted to have supported the Halal food festival. Plainly Halal food is of vital nutritional significance...I am very happy to support it and I hope it's properly promoted, and properly labeled."

Immigration:

"We do try to be as accommodating as possible and the home office has made huge strides... What I don't want to see is people coming in and exploiting the system, making a mockery of people who have been working hard. But be in no doubt we are absolutely open and we will help in any way we can."

Home office vans:

"I'll be absolutely clear about this. There was a problem of illegal immigration. And that's very important because it undermines confidence in the system and the credentials of those who are here legally.... I don't have as much a problem with that as others."

Languages and integration:

"I do believe in integration. I believe you have to speak English. It's the language of business, of Air traffic control (helpfully). It's the international language and I want everyone in London to have that basic economic tool. Its not fair on the people in this city, and I'm thinking particularly of female populations, who have been here for some time, if they cannot use this basic economic tool and cannot participate in London life in the way they should."

[On Mandarin and Arabic] *"It is taught, but isn't on offer as often as I'd like. Arabic another language we should be learning more often, and I've actually set up a Mayor's prize for the best performance in Arabic by a pupil in a London school"*.

New Airport for London

"Well they've got to pull their finger out. I genuinely think we're missing the boat on this. What is happening is that businessmen from the UK cannot get to many of the big growth destinations in Asia and South America as they can across Europe. We are unable to expand our aviation capacity in the SE of the UK. Unfortunately Heathrow is in the wrong place for expansion...I am convinced that the iron logic of my plan will win through."

HS2

"We've got to get firmly behind this. We need it to work for London. Overall, get away from the argument this is about high-speed. The most important thing is that it is giving our country the extra capacity it needs on the rail"

Green Transport

"The last figures I saw said we have more EVs than any other city in Europe...they have an auto lib system in Paris to try them out...but it's not really clear to us that it's taking cars off the road...instead of walking they're using cars instead...we're not yet persuaded that it's the right way forward...what is certainly true is that the market is not yet mature. The vehicles in my view are slightly too expensive, they need to come down a bit in my view."

Infrastructure Speeds

"When I was in China I took a train that went 813 miles, and it had stations you could eat your breakfast off, and it took them two years to build the whole thing. Which is about as long as it would take us to do an environmental impact assessment. I went to the Hong Kong airport...fantastic thing that they built using reclaimed land. How long did it take? Five years?...We need to get a grip on our infrastructure"

Role of the Mayor

"I think that's totally irrelevant. The job of the mayor is to deliver better services and better value to the people of the city...cut council tax, massively cut crime, more affordable housing...that's how you get re-elected. Important job to talk things up, but it's about the difference you make."

Impact of Sporting Events on London

"I would say the most important thing if you're running a colossal international sporting event is not to give into despair. There'll be lots of people who try to knock you and ferment a climate of gloom."

[On criticism that the Olympics etc have been vanity projects] *"No! These people are miserablists. They objected to the Olympics. Those are people who were routed over the Olympics and proved them completely wrong. They have seen since the Olympics that those*

games have been a spectacular advertisement for London. We have seen stupendous sums of investment... Sport is a bit part of that. They should put a sock in it – that's my view."

Property

[On the idea of a mansion tax] "No I don't think that's a good idea. It's an interesting question. People are worried that homes in London are being bought off plan and are not capable of being used by Londoners. I do think that those fears are overdone. Only 6% of London property are going to overseas investors, the same as in 1990. If you didn't have that level of confidence in London... we would not be able to build tens of thousands of affordable homes for Londoners. So I don't think this is a zero sum game – its win-win, and London is the better for attracting foreign investment.

Notes to editors:

Day 2: 9th World Islamic Economic Forum, Panel Discussions

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The World Islamic Economic Forum is taking place at London's ExCel from October 29-31 2013, meeting outside the Muslim world for the first time in its history. The Forum, entitled 'Changing Worlds, New Relationships', is jointly hosted by the Governments of the United Kingdom and Malaysia. 18 Global Leaders, 5 Central Bank Governors, and more than 2700 CEOs, captains of industry, academic scholars, regional experts, professionals, corporate managers, policy makers, innovators, business leaders and investors from 128 countries will come together to explore the range of investment and business opportunities available across the world. www.9thwief.org

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