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15th April 2020

Dear Philip (if I may)

When pundits look back on this period of our history they are going to have to answer one really testing question: “how did a country so deeply divided over Brexit manage to pivot in a matter of days to become one of the world’s most unified communities?”

For the answer we need look no further than Her Majesty’s March 19th message to the nation:

“At times such as these, I am reminded that our nation’s history has been forged by people and communities coming together to work as one, concentrating our combined efforts with a focus on the common goal.”

Nowhere has the coming together been more evident than in our capital. A wonderful symbol of this is the NHS Nightingale Hospital. In less than a fortnight, the ExCeL exhibition centre became the world’s largest critical care facility with capacity for up to 4,000 beds and 16,000 staff! Military planning, public and private construction, medical professionals and citizen volunteers proving the power of ‘combined efforts with a focus on the common goal’. Indeed, my own Vice Lord-Lieutenant – Colonel Jane Davis OBE QVRM TD DL and recently retired Colonel Commandant Queen Alexandra’s Royal Army Nursing Corps – helped with the preparation and continues as an Operations Manager.

However, behind the proud headlines lie many worrying issues, including: those struck down by Covid-19; the vulnerable old who are housebound and dependent on others for life’s basics; children in cramped accommodation with little to satisfy the demands of agile minds and growing bodies.

Happily London is blessed by having many wonderful organisations like the Hounslow FoodBox who work tirelessly for no reward other than helping those less fortunate than themselves.

My Representative Deputy Lieutenant for the Borough of Hounslow – Paul Kennerley DL – has been in touch to tell me of the impressive way in which you and your volunteers have responded to the pandemic. While none of us knows how this will all end, we can be sure that feeding and providing human contact with the vulnerable will make the whole experience more tolerable for them. I must also commend the way in which you have engaged with local businesses to cement a truly community response.

These are difficult times for charities as well as for those whom we help. The Government has offered some support and although details are still emerging I would encourage you to check out the London Community Response Fund (<https://bit.ly/2wxLsSu>) to see if you can access any financial assistance.

In closing, I offer a quote from The Queen’s recent broadcast “I hope in the years to come everyone will be able to take pride in how they responded to this challenge.” I know that you and your colleagues will.

With very best wishes – and do stay safe.

Kenneth Olisa

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