

# **Speech delivered in London at the Celebration of the Faroese Flag Day on 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2025 by Prime Minister Aksel V. Johannesen**

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be with you here in London to celebrate our Flag Day, which is a national holiday in the Faroe Islands.

This year marks 80 years since the end of World War 2.

A moment that not only brought peace to Europe.

It also marked the end of the five year long British occupation of the Faroe Islands.

A chapter in our common history when the Faroe Islands and Britain stood together in close cooperation. It is not without reason that we call this chapter “the friendly occupation”.

We were bound by shared sacrifice, resilience and a friendship built in wartime.

You could also say:

When one chapter came to an end, another began.

But we see the lasting bond between the Faroe Islands and Britain as one continuous story, which is still being written.

Dear guests,

Today, I want to share a beautiful wartime story I was told the other day.

This is the story of a woman called Ásla Kjærþæk from the small Faroese village of Sumba.

In 1943, during the turbulence of World War II, a young British soldier named Stanley Charles Scaggs - known simply as Stan - was stationed at Akraberg, not far from Ásla's home.

He was a driver for the Royal Air Force and had first served at the Faroe Islands' main airbase in Vagar before being sent south.

There was an instant connection between Stan and Ásla.

Not long after, Stan was called away to serve on the frontlines of Europe.

He witnessed the liberation of concentration camps. He buried the dead.

Suddenly one day, in Berlin, he was caught in a grenade blast.

Stan survived. But he lost something essential.

His memory.

After a while, Stan's family in England reached out to Ásla.

Stan was alive but deeply affected by everything he had been through.

He had lost his memory, and nothing seemed to help.

They hoped that seeing Ásla again might bring Stan back to his old self.

So, in 1947, Ásla boarded a ship to England to live with her sister Meta - one of the many Faroese women who had married a British soldier.

But there was more to this journey. There was hope.

And when Stan saw Ásla again...

A miracle happened.

Stan's memory started to come back. Eventually, he remembered everything.

And with that, their love picked up right where it left off.

**The heart remembers what the mind forgets.**

Stan and Ásla married in 1951 and settled near Stan's parents in Southend.

And when Stan passed away in 1996, Ásla stood strong, surrounded by the life they built together.

Today, we have the privilege to have Ásla with us. In October she will be one hundred years old.

*Ásla, stóra takk fyri, at tú kundi koma til flaggdagshaldið í kvøld.*

This story reminds us that the relationship between the Faroese and the British is not only about political cooperation and strategic alliance.

It is also about people finding common ground.

Building lives together.

And supporting each other through war and peace.

Dear guests,

The first to officially recognise our flag was the British Government on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April in 1940.

85 years ago.

This was a major moment of recognition and pride for the Faroese people.

It became not just an emblem of our vessels but an emblem of our nation. A proud statement of who we are and what we stand for.

During World War 2 Faroese fishermen continued to risk their lives at sea, providing essential supplies to Britain, despite the constant threat of German U-boats and floating mines.

The relationship between the Faroese and the British was one of mutual dependence and respect.

Today, in a uncertain world where peace and stability can no longer be taken for granted, strong cooperation between the Faroe Islands and Britain remains as important as ever.

A recent survey by the University of the Faroe Islands showed that Faroese people believe that Britain is the most important country for the Faroes to increase cooperation with.

We appreciate the UK's leadership in regional security. We support the regular presence of British aircrafts and Navy vessels in our area as a part of Britain's efforts to safeguard NATO interests in the High North.

And we are ready to cooperate directly with in important areas such as air surveillance and cybersecurity, where the Faroes have a key strategic position and role to play.

Like the UK, we are committed to maintaining the North Atlantic – our common region – as an area of peace and stability.

At the same time is it essential to improve trade cooperation - for the benefit of both UK and the Faroe Islands.

Faroese fishing companies, such as JFK from my hometown of Klaksvík, have been supplying fish to Britain's national meal, fish and chips, for over one hundred years.

This long-standing commercial partnership was celebrated during this year's Fish and Chip Awards in London, when JFK hosted a special reception at the Speaker's House.

This same company also sponsors individual awards to local UK businesses that sell fish and chips.

You can't get more British than the UK's national meal.

We are also proud to be a part of this legacy still supplying quality fresh fish from the Faroes for the UK's favourite dish.

Strengthening trade relations is, of course, about more than selling fish, although some of my fellow Faroe Islanders might disagree.

My government's aim is to develop a broader and more diverse political and economic relationship with the UK in the years ahead.

This is something I am using my visit in London here this week to promote and advance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, let us remember all those who found – and still find - ways to bridge cultures and build friendships during trying times.

Let us remember the cooperation, the friendship and the sacrifice.

Ásla did not just bring back Stan's memories. She restored a future.

May the Faroe Islands and Britain continue to do the same for each other:

Remember our shared past, and move forward together in close cooperation, mutual understanding and lasting friendship.

Thank you.