

**Speech by Economy Minister Simon Hamilton at
Opportunity Egypt event, 9 September 2016**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Invest Northern Ireland's "Opportunity Egypt" event.

I am delighted to see so many Northern Ireland companies attending today and I hope that you will leave today, full of encouragement when you hear of the many business opportunities that exist in Egypt.

The Northern Ireland Executive recognises the importance of supporting our local businesses to explore export markets and to help you to develop international business opportunities in key markets. My Department's strategy "Export Matters" sets out our ambitions for growing our export led economy.

I was pleased to see that the latest HMRC figures, released earlier this week, showed that over the last 12 month rolling period, Northern Ireland was the only UK country to see an increase in exports. I want us to build on the success of this latest 9.5% rise in exports and help Northern Ireland to become an increasingly outward looking, trading region.

Growing our exports is a critical element of growing local business and transforming Northern Ireland into a globally competitive economy.

Equally, an exciting new era is beginning for the United Kingdom. Where doors are being opened to new trading relationships and emerging markets, Northern Ireland must be ready to seize the opportunities.

That's why I have been working closely with Invest NI to develop a Trade Accelerator Plan that further boosts our export capabilities and perfectly place Northern Ireland for the years ahead.

Our Trade Accelerator Plan aims to further increase exports by locally based businesses and also to expand the number of companies trading outside of Northern Ireland through a range of enhanced supports from Invest NI for both existing and first time exporters.

For those already exporting, Invest NI is increasing its support for market visits to ensure businesses are able to strengthen existing relationships.

This support will include assistance for more country visits, and access to Invest NI's team of advisors based in countries around the world.

For those of you yet to take the first step and begin exporting, Invest NI is enhancing its programme of support for first time exporters looking at our closest markets – Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. For our SMEs, this will include assistance for travel and accommodation for Great Britain market visits and accommodation for Republic of Ireland visits.

Invest NI has increased support for companies to attend exhibitions through the SOLEX scheme, to 50% up to a maximum of £2,000, from the previous levels of 40% to a maximum of £1,500.

A new GB Market Introduction programme, modelled on the highly successful Going Dutch programme, is being launched, initially for the construction sector, and a Republic of Ireland Food Retail Development programme is under development.

These will be complemented by additional Meet the Buyer events and Market Study visits in sectors and geographies where our businesses have identified opportunities.

In these markets, and more, we will increase the amount of in-market Trade Advisory Support that companies can draw on, from 20 days to 30 days.

Invest NI will continue to work closely with IntertradeIreland, the UK Department for International Trade, along with local organisations such as the NI Chamber of Commerce and industry to provide the most efficient and effective support to grow our export base.

Growing exports and developing international relationships are at the very heart of Northern Ireland's new Programme for Government. The First Minister

also made MORE JOBS a key part of her 5 Point Plan for Northern Ireland. I was elected on that Plan. Arlene has tasked me to drive forward our exports and ensure that Northern Ireland regains its place on the global stage as an economic powerhouse.

As people in business, you will know that sales is a tough trade. It requires relentless effort. A good salesperson will always go the extra mile to close a deal. As a small region with a local government, I want to be in the business of going the extra mile to assist you in closing more export deals. I hope that this new Trade Accelerator Plan will help to grow our exports further and in the process increase employment locally.

Ladies and gentlemen, the appointment of Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP as the Prime Minister's UK Trade Envoy to Egypt is excellent news for Northern Ireland.

The role of a Trade Envoy is to work with governments and businesses across the UK and in priority markets overseas to advance trade. This appointment demonstrates a clear commitment to supporting Egypt as an export market by dedicating high level political support to specifically build key partnerships and relationships to strengthen trade and investment.

Egypt is a market of opportunities due to its diverse economy, its strategic position at the gateway to three continents and its fast growing population – a population of 90 million people with over half under the age of 25.

Northern Ireland exports to Egypt accounted for £16m in 2015/16, with 69% of exports in the Machinery and Transport sector.

The Department of International Trade and The Egyptian British Business Council are two important partners in our efforts to build our relationships with Egypt. They are able to provide valuable advice and guidance to business, supporting them to realise identified opportunities and helping them to grow in this new market.

Jason, from the Department of International Trade, and Robin from the Egyptian British Business Council, are both here today and will be speaking to you later about how they can help with your plans.

We also have Liz McCrory from UK Export Finance credit agency, here to speak to you today about how to finance and insure your export business. Invest NI's close working relationship with UK Export Finance has ensured that many local companies exploring and selling to new markets receive expert advice on finance

and insurance, helping them to win, fulfil and ensure payment for export contracts.

I would encourage you to explore the many emerging opportunities for exporting, and specifically to understand the new opportunities offered by Egypt's diverse economy.

As the Economy Minister in your local Executive, I want to be accessible to you and ensure that where assistance is needed, we can work alongside you as part of your team. Just as you will be hungry to grow your business and ensure it reaches new markets, I also will work tirelessly to ensure we do all we can to help.

Over the last decade we have become accustomed to celebrating new jobs arriving in Northern Ireland.

Throughout my time as Economy Minister, I want us to also become accustomed to celebrating new export

deals. Where an exporting deal is signed it should be celebrated as good news for Northern Ireland. I want to create an atmosphere for business in Northern Ireland where they feel confident in their product to take it to new markets and where they know that their government is behind them all the way.

I trust this event will help you open new doors. Thank you for taking the time to come along and I wish you all every success.