

As a business Minister in Gordon Brown's Government and as Labour's spokesman on the Middle East and Africa, it was fascinating to hear the former Prime Minister's insight on the importance of interdependence and co-operation this morning.

As someone who has travelled in my role in the last two years throughout the Middle East and Africa, what has struck me are not the differences, many though they are, between Europe and these parts of the world, but the similarities.

It seems to me that the defining issue of our time is youth unemployment. In the UK, long term youth unemployment exceeded 20% last week and in some European states it exceeds 50%.

I know from visits to states across North Africa how important an issue this is there.

We know that there are enormous infrastructure challenges and, as Gordon Brown said this morning, we must ensure that our young people are employed addressing those challenges.

For the challenges and opportunities are new: of culture which, from the country of the Beatles and Adele, brings huge benefits, of communications, beyond our contemplation only ten years ago, of preserving our environment. These are challenges that require educated ideas and innovation.

And the way that our economies will address these changes is undergoing transformation. In the 1980s and 1990s, a job was something you secured from somewhere else. In the UK today, it is something that, increasingly, people have to make for themselves: forming new businesses, working flexibly and nimbly to meet different demands.

We know of the entrepreneurial skills of the Arab world: what we must all now do is make it as easy as possible for young people to develop those skills. We must remove bureaucratic barriers that prevent young people from developing potential and which which are sometimes used as corrupt practices.

They are an intense source of frustration to anyone who wants to address a problem through imagination and innovation.

These are issues that do not divide us, but unite us. We have the problem of wasted youth in common: let us work together to solve the problem by removing the barriers to development we also share.