



Easter Banquet

Mansion House

Wednesday 4th May 2011

The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of London

Alderman Michael Bear

Introduction

Your Excellencies, Secretary of State, Fellow Aldermen, Mr Recorder, Sheriffs, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the Mansion House. I am delighted to see a packed House this evening as we honour the Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and all those accredited to the Court of St. James.

Over the past two-and-a-half centuries the Mansion House has been host to diplomatic gatherings, major foreign policy addresses, and moments of global importance. This is a house of history where history continues to be made.

And, Foreign Secretary, a very special welcome to you at the end of your first year in office and to your first Easter Banquet.

Thank you for joining us – especially the day before an historic event for our country: the referendum on the voting system for elections to our Parliament.

I would like to thank you and everyone at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for your invaluable assistance in supporting my visits abroad – particularly at such a very demanding time. And we are especially looking forward to your analysis of the global situation in a few minutes time.

A special welcome to the late Lord Mayor, my predecessor, Alderman Nick Anstee and his wife, Claire, fresh out of Purdah! I want to thank them both for their invaluable service to the City.

Members of the diplomatic community, we are honoured by your presence.

And I would like to pay tribute to the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, the Ambassador of Kuwait, Khaled al Duwaisan. Thank you, your Excellency, for your inspirational leadership over almost two decades.

Ambassadors and High Commissioners, there is much we will do together. During my year in office I will visit more than twenty countries.

I will also meet many members of the diplomatic corps here in London.

I thank you for your hard work and your tireless efforts to build bridges between your nations and the City.

As a very civil engineer myself, I know the value of bridges.

A bridge connects people, brings them closer together.

And you are all builders of bridges between the nations. You build the bridges of dialogue and commerce, trade and culture.

Bridges that bring us all closer together, now and in the future.

Tonight we meet in a city of bridges. In fact, historian Peter Ackroyd states that London is a city *defined* by its bridges, a city whose history was *created* by bridges.

Foreign Secretary, as an historian yourself, you will know that London owes its existence to a bridge built just a few feet from here, near London Bridge.

The Romans founded a settlement two thousand years ago, at this place, because it was a prime location to span the vast and wide water highway of the Thames.

That bridge enabled London to quickly become a crossroads by land and sea, a port, a gateway to Britain.

And to this day, London remains a multicultural capital, with bridges of commerce, culture, trade and investment to every part of the world.

The Role of the City

You can see the City's impact at home and abroad.

Today, the City makes a huge contribution to the UK:

- 10 per cent of our GDP;
- £53.4 billion into the Exchequer;
- 300,000 jobs in the City of London, another three quarters of a million across the country.

Globally, foreign direct investment in the UK was valued at over £1 trillion in 2010.

And the investment and business that comes here arrives and thrives at perhaps the safest and most prosperous destination in the world.

True, the City has experienced a "lean year."

But comparatively, we have weathered the financial storm better than most financial centres.

And now, we have a reconstituted City, stronger than ever, surging back, gaining confidence, eager for the future, with renewed emphasis on best practice, responsibility, transparency, accountability, and stability.

The City is undergoing renewal in an age of austerity. To usher in a new age of prosperity.

We can do even more. I have urged the Prime Minister and the Coalition Government to remove unnecessary and costly regulation, to roll back bureaucracy and reduce tax burdens, to work more closely with the financial sector to create more jobs and encourage further investment.

I have stressed at all levels of Government that the City is part of the *solution* to our current challenges.

More than any other city, London is positioned to be the capital of an engaged, profitable, caring, and compassionate new age.

Already the pieces are being put into place. The Government strongly supports investment in vital infrastructure to enhance the flow of goods and people.

And this is happening while London becomes a world leader in protecting the environment, finding ways to encourage sustainability and profitability.

The Big Society has generated a national debate on the roles of citizen and government, leading to a greater recognition of the importance of choice in empowering every individual in our society.

We are defining ourselves anew, now and for the future.

And a Great Britain renewed will be better prepared for the challenges of the generations to come.

To our friends in the diplomatic community, the City wants to strengthen our ties with all your countries.

We want to continue to do business with you. We look forward to strengthening and expanding our work together. We want to be your partner of choice.

And I say this to you because commercial diplomacy is good for all our countries.

It creates jobs, good jobs, jobs of consequence that are an investment in people. Commerce and trade can stabilize a country, give its people a stake in its wealth and its politics. It lifts more and more people out of poverty into the middle class.

As our citizens join together, we will help build a better world.

Nelson Mandela once described the building of a home as "a joining of hands."

Our efforts at commercial diplomacy are also a joining of hands, recognition that our futures are bound together, and that we are neighbours as well as nations.

Truly, we live in a global village.

Our Common Future

And tonight I invite you to join hands with the City, to build bridges to a better future for our citizens.

Because investment is foreign policy. Jobs are foreign policy. So are commerce, trade, and travel.

In our global village, our domestic decisions have repercussions right across the world: in our transport and infrastructure, in our consumer choices, in our pension funds, and in the arts.

And the arts can play a very special role. The City sponsored concerts for the first time in Vietnam and China during my visits.

And we want to repeat its success on future visits. Because art and culture enhance our relationships. They bring people together.

And philanthropy can also be foreign policy.

My own Lord Mayor's Appeal principally supports two charities: Coram, London's foremost children's charity, and RedR, a wonderful charity responding to international emergencies and disasters.

RedR's work in helping those affected by natural disasters around the world is practical foreign policy at its best – providing them with the bare necessities.

The City also has a long tradition of reaching out, changing the world with compassion and commitment. The philanthropic traditions of the City and its livery companies are among the oldest in the world, reaching back hundreds of years.

Foreign Secretary, the City of London is a valuable resource.

In an age of austerity, we are experienced, connected, hard working, and eager to help. We can do more through co-operation than acting alone.

And to our friends in the diplomatic corps, the City is open for business and ready to build bridges to the future. We have a long history of reaching out and working together.

Five hundred years ago, in the reign of the first Elizabeth , the City was allowed, even encouraged, to send foreign delegations of merchants on missions to foreign courts.

These diplomats of business and trade met kings and queens. The power of commerce engaging with the power of the state.

Since that time, the City has been actively involved in bringing the world to the City and the City to the world.

Architectural historian Dan Cruickshank writes that bridges are “audacious and epic engines of transformation.”

He’s right. Bridges can change the world.

And, tonight, let us honour those building the bridges that will shape our future.

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise and join me in a toast to the:

Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and other Representatives of Foreign and Commonwealth Governments

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