

The Prime Minister's Speech to the U. S. Congress

4 March 2009

Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice-President, distinguished members of Congress, I come to this great capital of this great nation, an America renewed under a new President to say that America's faith in the future has been, is and always will be an inspiration to the whole world.

The very creation of America was a bold affirmation of faith in the future: a future you have not just believed in but built with your own hands.

And on January 20th, you the American people began to write the latest chapter in the American story, with a transition of dignity, in which both sides of the aisle could take great pride. President Obama gave the world renewed hope, and on that day billions of people truly looked to Washington, D.C. as "a shining city upon a hill".

And I hope that you will allow me to single out for special mention today one of your most distinguished Senators, known in every continent and a great friend. Northern Ireland is today at peace, more Americans have healthcare, more children around the world are going to school, and for all those things we owe a great debt to the life and courage of, Senator Edward Kennedy.

And so today, having talked to him last night, I want to announce that Her Majesty the Queen has awarded an honorary Knighthood for Sir Edward Kennedy.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice-President, I come in friendship to renew, for new times, our special relationship founded upon our shared history, our shared values and, I believe, our shared futures.

I grew up in the 1960s as America, led by President Kennedy, looked to the heavens and saw not the endless void of the unknown, but a new frontier to dare to discover and explore. People said it couldn't be done - but America did it.

And 20 years later, in the 1980's, America led by President Reagan refused to accept the fate of millions trapped behind an Iron Curtain, and insisted instead that the people of Eastern Europe be allowed to join the ranks of nations which live safe, strong and free. People said it would never happen in our lifetime but it did, and the Berlin Wall was torn down brick by brick.

So early in my life I came to understand that America is not just the indispensable nation, it is the irrepressible nation.

Throughout your history Americans have led insurrections in the human imagination, have summoned revolutionary times through your belief that there is no such thing as an impossible endeavour. It is never possible to come here without having your faith in the future renewed.

Throughout a whole century the American people stood liberty's ground not just in one world war but in two.

And I want you to know that we will never forget the sacrifice and service of the American soldiers who gave their lives for people whose names they never knew, and whose faces they never saw, and yet people who have lived in freedom thanks to the bravery and valour of the Americans who gave the "last full measure of devotion".

Cemetery after cemetery across Europe honours the memory of American soldiers, resting row upon row - often alongside comrades-in-arms from Britain. There is no battlefield of liberty on which there

is not a piece of land that is marked out as American and there is no day of remembrance in Britain that is not also a commemoration of American courage and sacrifice far from home.

In the hardest days of the last century, faith in the future kept America alive and I tell you that America kept faith in the future alive for all the world.

Almost every family in Britain has a tie that binds them to America. So I want you to know that whenever a young American soldier or marine, sailor or airman is killed in conflict anywhere in the world, we, the people of Britain, grieve with you. Know that your loss is our loss; your families' sorrow is our families' sorrow and your nation's determination is our nation's determination that they shall not have died in vain.

And let me pay tribute to the soldiers, yours and ours, who again fight side by side in the plains of Afghanistan and the streets of Iraq, just as their forefathers fought side by side in the sands of Tunisia, on the beaches of Normandy and then on the bridges over the Rhine.

And after that terrible September morning when your homeland was attacked, the Coldstream Guards at Buckingham Palace played the Star Spangled Banner. Our own British tribute as we wept for our friends in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And let me promise you our continued support to ensure there is no hiding place for terrorists, no safe haven for terrorism. You should be proud that in the hard years since 2001 you have shown that while terrorists may destroy buildings and even, tragically, lives, they have not, and will not ever, destroy the American spirit.

So let it be said of the friendship between our two countries; that it is in times of trial - true, in the face of fear - faithful and amidst the storms of change - constant.

And let it be said of our friendship - formed and forged over two tumultuous centuries, a friendship tested in war and strengthened in peace - that it has not just endured but is renewed in each generation to better serve our shared values and fulfill the hopes and dreams of the day. Not an alliance of convenience, but a partnership of purpose.

Alliances can wither or be destroyed, but partnerships of purpose are indestructible. Friendships can be shaken, but our friendship is unshakeable. Treaties can be broken but our partnership is unbreakable. And I know there is no power on earth than can drive us apart.

We will work tirelessly with you as partners for peace in the Middle East: for a two state solution that provides for nothing less than a secure Israel safe within its borders existing side by side with a viable Palestinian state.

And our shared message to Iran is simple - we are ready for you to rejoin the world community. But first, you must cease your threats and suspend your nuclear programme. And we will work tirelessly with all those in the international community who are ready to reduce the threat of nuclear proliferation.

Past British Prime Ministers have travelled to this Capitol building in times of war to talk of war. I come now to talk of new and different battles we must fight together; to speak of a global economy in crisis and a planet imperilled.

These are new priorities for our new times.

And let us be honest - tonight too many parents, after they put their children to bed, will speak of their worries about losing their jobs or the need to sell the house. Too many will share stories of friends or neighbours already packing up their homes, and too many will talk of a local store or business that has already gone to the wall.

For me, this global recession is not to be measured just in statistics, or in graphs or in figures on a balance sheet. Instead I see one individual with their own aspirations and increasingly their own apprehensions, and then another, and then another.

Each with their own stars to reach for.

Each part of a family, each at the heart of a community now in need of help and hope.

And when banks have failed and markets have faltered, we the representatives of the people have to be the people's last line of defence.

And that's why there is no financial orthodoxy so entrenched, no conventional thinking so engrained, no special interest so strong that it should ever stand in the way of the change that hard-working families need.

We have learned through this world downturn that markets should be free but never values-free, that the risks people take should never be separated from the responsibilities they meet.

And if perhaps some once thought it beyond our power to shape global markets to meet the needs of people, we know now that is our duty; we cannot and must not stand aside.

In our families and workplaces and places of worship, we celebrate men and women of integrity who work hard, treat people fairly, take responsibility and look out for others.

If these are the principles we live by in our families and neighbourhoods, they should also be the principles that guide and govern our economic life too.

In these days the world has learned that what makes for the good economy makes for the good society.

My father was a Minister of the church and I have learned again what I was taught by him: that wealth must help more than the wealthy, good fortune must serve more than the fortunate and riches must enrich not just some of us but all.

And these enduring values are the values we need for these new times.

We tend to think of the sweep of destiny as stretching across many months and years before culminating in decisive moments we call history.

But sometimes the reality is that defining moments of history come suddenly and without warning. And the task of leadership then is to define them, shape them and move forward into the new world they demand.

An economic hurricane has swept the world, creating a crisis of credit and of confidence.

History has brought us now to a point where change is essential. We are summoned not just to manage our times but to transform them.

Our task is to rebuild prosperity and security in a wholly different economic world, where competition is no longer local but global and banks are no longer just national but international.

And we need to understand what went wrong in this crisis, that the very financial instruments that were designed to diversify risk across the banking system instead spread contagion across the globe. And today's financial institutions are so interwoven that a bad bank anywhere is a threat to good banks everywhere.

So should we succumb to a race to the bottom and a protectionism that history tells us that, in the end, protects no-one? No. We should have the confidence that we can seize the opportunities ahead and make the future work for us.

Why?

Because while today people are anxious and feel insecure, over the next two decades literally billions of people in other continents will move from being simply producers of their goods to being consumers of our goods and in this way our world economy will double in size.

Twice as many opportunities for business, twice as much prosperity, and the biggest expansion of middle class incomes and jobs the world has ever seen.

And America and Britain will succeed and lead if we tap into the talents of our people, unleash the genius of our scientists and set free the drive of our entrepreneurs. We will win the race to the top if we can develop the new high value products and services and the new green technologies that the rising numbers of hard-working families across our globe will want to buy.

So we must educate our way out of the downturn, invest and invent our way out of the downturn and re-tool and re-skill our way out of the downturn.

And this is not blind optimism or synthetic confidence to console people; it is the practical affirmation for our times of our faith in a better future.

Every time we rebuild a school we demonstrate our faith in the future. Every time we send more young people to university, every time we invest more in our new digital infrastructure, every time we increase support to our scientists, we demonstrate our faith in the future.

And so I say to this Congress and this country, something that runs deep in your character and is woven in your history, we conquer our fear of the future through our faith in the future.

And it is this faith in the future that means we must commit to protecting the planet for generations that will come long after us.

As the Greek proverb says, why does anybody plant the seeds of a tree whose shade they will never see?

The answer is because they look to the future.

And I believe that you, the nation that had the vision to put a man on the moon, are also the nation with the vision to protect and preserve our planet earth.

And it is only by investing in environmental technology that we can end the dictatorship of oil, and it is only by tackling climate change that we create the millions of new green jobs we need.

For the lesson of this crisis is that we cannot just wait for tomorrow today. We cannot just think of tomorrow today. We cannot merely plan for tomorrow today. Our task must be to build tomorrow today.

And America knows from its history that its reach goes far beyond its geography. For a century you have carried upon your shoulders the greatest of responsibilities: to work with and for the rest of the world. And let me tell you that now more than ever the rest of the world wants to work with you.

And if these times have shown us anything it is that the major challenges we all face are global. No matter where it starts, an economic crisis does not stop at the water's edge. It ripples across the world. Climate change does not honour passport control. Terrorism has no respect for borders. And modern communications instantly span every continent. The new frontier is that there is no frontier; the new shared truth is that global problems need global solutions.

And let me say that you now have the most pro-American European leadership in living memory. A leadership that wants to cooperate more closely together, in order to cooperate more closely with you. There is no old Europe, no new Europe, there is only your friend Europe.

So once again I say we should seize the moment - because never before have I seen a world so willing to come together. Never before has that been more needed. And never before have the benefits of cooperation been so far-reaching.

So when people here and in other countries ask what more can we do now to bring an end to this downturn, let me say this: we can achieve more working together. And just think of what we can do if we combine not just in a partnership for security but in a new partnership for prosperity too.

On jobs, you the American people through your stimulus proposals could create or save at least 3 million jobs. We in Britain are acting with similar determination. How much nearer an end to this downturn would we be if the whole of the world resolved to do the same?

And you are also restructuring your banks. So are we. But how much safer would everybody's savings be if the whole world finally came together to outlaw shadow banking systems and offshore tax havens?

Just think how each of our actions, if combined, could mean a whole, much greater than the sum of the parts:

- all, and not just some, banks stabilised;
- on fiscal stimulus: the impact multiplied because everybody does it;
- rising demand in all our countries creating jobs in each of our countries; and
- trade once again the engine of prosperity, the wealth of nations restored.

No one should forget that it was American visionaries who over half a century ago, coming out of the deepest of depressions and the worst of wars, produced the boldest of plans for global economic cooperation because they recognised prosperity was indivisible and concluded that to be sustained it had to be shared.

And I believe that ours too is a time for renewal, for a plan for tackling recession and building for the future. Every continent playing their part in a global new deal, a plan for prosperity that can benefit us all.

First, so that the whole of the worldwide banking system serves our prosperity rather than risks it, let us agree rules and standards for accountability, transparency, and reward that will mean an end to the excesses and will apply to every bank, everywhere, and all the time.

Second, America and a few countries cannot be expected to bear the burden of the fiscal and interest rate stimulus alone. We must share it globally. So let us work together for the worldwide reduction of interest rates and a scale of stimulus round the world equal to the depth of the recession and the dimensions of the recovery we must make.

Third, let us together renew our international economic cooperation, helping the emerging markets rebuild their banks. And let us work together for a low carbon recovery worldwide. And I am confident that this President, this Congress and the peoples of the world can come together in Copenhagen this December to reach a historic agreement on climate change.

And let us not forget the poorest. As we strive to spread the values of peace, political liberty, and the hope for better lives across the world, perhaps the greatest gift our generation could give to the future, the gift of America and Britain to the world could be, for every child in every country of the world, the chance millions do not have today; the chance to go to school.

For let us remember there is a common bond that unites us as human beings across different beliefs, cultures and nationalities. It is at the core of my convictions, the essence of America's spirit and the heart of all faiths.

And it must be at the centre of our response to the crisis of today. At their best, our values tell us that we cannot be wholly content while others go without, cannot be fully comfortable while millions go without comfort, cannot be truly happy while others grieve alone.

And this too is true. All of us know that in a recession the wealthiest, the most powerful and the most privileged can find a way through for themselves.

So we do not value the wealthy less when we say that our first duty is to help the not so wealthy. We do not value the powerful less when we say that our first responsibility is to help the powerless. And we do not value those who are secure less when we say that our first priority must be to help the insecure.

These recent events have forced us all to think anew. And while I have learnt many things, I keep returning to something I first learned in my father's church as a child. In this most modern of crises I am drawn to the most ancient of truths; wherever there is hardship, wherever there is suffering, we cannot, we will not, pass by on the other side.

But working together there is no challenge to which we are not equal, no obstacle that we cannot overcome, no aspiration so high that it cannot be achieved.

In the depths of the Depression, when Franklin Roosevelt did battle with fear itself, it was not simply by the power of his words, his personality and his example that he triumphed.

Yes, all these things mattered. But what mattered more was this enduring truth: that you, the American people, at your core, were, as you remain, every bit as optimistic as your Roosevelts, your Reagans and your Obamas.

This is the faith in the future that has always been the story and promise of America. So at this defining moment in history let us renew our special relationship for our generation and our times. Let

us restore prosperity and protect this planet and, with faith in the future, let us together build tomorrow today.

Source: 10 Downing Street