

First Minister's speech

Your Majesty,

On behalf of the people of Scotland, I thank you for the honour of your presence here today.

I would also like to thank, on behalf of everyone, those who have performed for Scotland in this chamber. A chamber at the heart of our new Scottish Parliament building.

It is a heart that should beat with the pulse of the nation and resound with the passion of Scotland. This chamber, a triumph of design and engineering, is the place Scotland's Parliament can now call home.

At the opening of our Parliament in 1999, Donald Dewar said that devolution, once a dream, was now a reality. Today that reality is manifest in steel and concrete, wood and glass.

The road to completion has been a difficult one. The strength of our new democracy has been tested.

But we have matured more quickly than many expected, and encountered sorrows and challenges along the way that no-one could have anticipated.

After five years, our young parliament can now take up occupation of this, its permanent address.

This is a building to which we have come amid debate and controversy. The Scots are, as the late Willie Ross once said, a disputatious people - and, indeed, we were true to that trait as we brought this building to life.

It is now accepted, without dispute, that this is the permanent home for the nation's final discussion on matters that affect the way we live, and the way we shape the lives of future generations.

But this building is not the Scottish Parliament.

This magnificent building can inspire admiration for its design and its detail, but it cannot by

its mere existence influence opinions or judgements on public policy.

It is we who are elected to serve who form the human institution that is the Scottish Parliament.

It is how we perform our duties, how we advance or inhibit the progress of this nation, in our conduct and the decisions we make, that will chart the future course of Scotland.

Your Majesty. We have a new building, in a new century, in a world that has changed greatly since you graced us with your presence in 1999.

Then the world felt safer than before - but now the threat from global terrorism hangs over us.

Since then, life sciences, digital technology, and renewable energy have developed almost beyond recognition.

And as we look to the future, we can see a world that will change faster still.

That is why we should not just deal with the challenges of today.

In Scotland, in this parliament, we must imagine what the future will hold. The pace of progress is quickening and the possibilities for us are limitless.

This parliament should dare to open minds to the opportunities that change brings. And seize those opportunities for the people of Scotland.

So, let us all be thinking persons. Let us all be open and adventurous. But most of all, let us be confident that we do live in a country of great talent and opportunity, of enterprise, and of compassion and tolerance too.

Let us indeed pick up that thread of pride and self-esteem and make our nation proud again.

For we have much to be proud of. Scotland's contribution to the world far outweighs our size. Scottish scientists, philosophers, economists, engineers, explorers and artists have made their mark on history.

Still today, Scottish scientists and engineers are inventing and creating the 21st century world. Our artists, musicians and our entrepreneurs stretch our imagination and expand our potential.

And our young people have a confidence and ambition seldom seen in recent generations.

There is a spring in Scotland's step again and I for one felt it today as we came down the Royal Mile.

Your Majesty, our thanks.

Your support for this institution has been appreciated. We are grateful for your good wishes, and we wish you well in all you do for our country.

Five years ago, Scotland found a new voice in the land. Today we celebrate a new confidence in the country.

A permanent Parliament within which to announce our ambitions, encourage our enterprise and fight for fairness.

We have a new building that will be the envy of many the world over.

But today, more than anything, we have a parliament that has come of age in a country whose time has come.