

Speech: Lord Chancellor swearing-in speech: David Lidington

Mr Attorney, I'd like to thank the Lord Chief Justice for his kind words and warm welcome. I too look forward to working with the Lord Chief Justice and the other eminent members of the bench.

It's an enormous privilege and a great honour to have been sworn in as Lord Chancellor and to have received the Great Seal of the Realm, an ancient symbol of this office that has 900 years of history behind it.

The freedoms and protections that we all enjoy are of course built on a principle that is much more important than the seals and the symbols of office – the rule of law itself.

That principle, together with the independence of the judiciary, form the very bedrock of a free and democratic society.

They safeguard us against tyranny and dictatorship.

They allow us to live in a society where no individual and no government is above the law, a society where everyone can expect equality before the law and the right to a fair trial, a society where executive power is balanced by both a strong judiciary that acts without fear or favour and a scrutinising legislature – something that I have seen in action over 25 years as a member of Parliament and in the last 12 months as Leader of the House of Commons.

Three branches of the state, each separate, but each having a mutual respect for the others.

I know from my previous ministerial experience how important the strength of those structures and the rule of law are.

As Europe Minister, one of my key priorities was to promote the protection of human rights and help uphold the rule of law in countries across Europe, especially perhaps in those European nations that had seen those traditions crushed.

I've seen the impact on people's lives when they falter.

And I'm proud of our work to support countries all over the world, for example in Eastern Europe, nations like Albania and Bulgaria, where the United Kingdom is helping them build the strong justice and legal systems they need for their democracies to deepen and flourish.

And I have seen that you, as senior judges, have played – and continue to play – a vital role in that noble work, extending your expertise, through the Judicial College and other organisations like the Slynn Foundation, to assist countries with judicial training and court reform.

And for that, thank you.

For me, this overseas perspective serves as a sharp reminder of just how precious those principles are here at home – for protecting our freedoms, our democracy, and our way of life – a way of life, which we have seen in the dreadful news from north London today, remains under threat.

So I am determined I will be resolute and unflinching as Lord Chancellor in upholding the rule of law and defending the independence of the judiciary.

The very reason countries look to us for support is because the UK is seen as the home of high quality justice and legal services.

People come here from around the world to have their legal disputes resolved because they know that they will get a fair and independent hearing.

And for this, we have much to thank the exceptional men and women that make up our judiciary.

Your intellect, your sharp legal minds, your wealth of knowledge, together with your dedication, personal integrity and commitment ensure we have a judiciary that is fair, free from improper influence, and truly independent.

Now, wearing these robes today for the first time, it is impossible not to feel the history.

But I see, too, how important it is to look beyond the pageantry to how, robed or not, bewigged or bare-headed, judges embody the rule of law.

You all carry the weight – often the lonely weight – of this most vital duty, both in the judgments you make in individual cases, and in the development of the common law itself – a jurisprudence that is world-renowned.

For that – and for the strength and health which this has brought to our country and our society – I want to thank you all sincerely.

But we should never be complacent about the need to build on and protect our successes, nor be too shy to embrace reform where that is needed.

And looking ahead as we leave the European Union, it will be a priority for me to promote our excellent legal services both at home and as a major UK export, to maintain London as a competitive hub and ensure people continue to see English law as the law of choice.

I also want to work together to make sure the administration of justice is swifter and puts the citizen at the centre of what we do by harnessing all the new opportunities which the technologies of our digital age have to offer.

And I know much hard work has already been done to modernise the courts and tribunals system for the 21st century, and how the judiciary has led that endeavour, and I look forward to continuing that important work with you.

The principles of justice that I swear to protect and promote in my Oath as Lord Chancellor are timeless.

Our approach to the way we protect and administer those principles of justice is in many cases modern.

And together, we can not only celebrate and preserve our proud history, but work to ensure that justice continues to be fairly administered and robustly defended for the next 900 years.