

Speech: Remembrance Sunday Address

Your Royal Highness, Your Excellencies, Lord & Lady Reed, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. But most of all, the veterans present.

As we gather here today, within the same week as Diwali, to pay tribute to those who gave of themselves, who made the ultimate sacrifice in war, I note the alignment with the festival of Diwali: light over darkness, good over evil, knowledge over ignorance and hope over despair.

A perfect articulation of this is the art installation at The Tower of London in commemoration of the centenary of the end of the WW1. It is called "Beyond the Deepening Shadow". Each evening 10,000 flickering flames are lit casting light into the darkness, reminding us that we can find the light even in the darkest of times.

These are the ideals that must prevail. These are the ideals that are worth fighting for.

Remembrance around the world is marked in various ways. Our traditions may vary. But what is common – our shared responsibility as the living – is to ensure that there is Remembrance.

For those of us who stand free – free to choose – free to speak – free to be whom we want to be – it is imperative we understand that the gift of freedom is not to be taken for granted. We must never forget that over mankind's history, freedom is something that has been hard won and it has been the result of unspeakable loss and sacrifice.

It is that sacrifice that we commemorate here today.

Our tradition in the UK is a commemoration on the 2nd Sunday of November – Remembrance Sunday. And this year, Remembrance Sunday coincides with the centenary of Armistice Day. Today we mark 100 years since the end of the First World War.

Armistice: The moment when peace came. The moment when hostilities ceased. The moment when the guns fell silent on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month.

Today's Remembrance Sunday therefore has special resonance.

Thousands of miles away in Paris, 80 world leaders and 90 delegations from around the world gather for a commemoration at the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs Elysees.

President Macron of France will then host the inaugural Paris Peace Forum. It seems the lessons have yet to be learned about the price of war. It is that high price, from wars and conflicts past, that reminds us why diplomacy must come first. That war must be the last resort.

At the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, over 16 million people on all sides – military and civilian – had been killed.

The heavy price of war.

The price for freedom.

The price of liberation of occupied countries and the restoration of sovereignty and the rule of law.

Many came.

Over 3 million from America, Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Newfoundland.

New Zealand paid the highest price as a proportion of its male population, 5% of all their men aged between 15-49 years were killed.

But we must remember too, especially in these global times, when suspicion of the other, when racial harmony seems fragile in so many countries, that others came.

1.5 million came from the Indian sub-continent, of which 800,000 were Hindus, 400,000 were Muslims, 100,000 were Sikhs and 62,000 of their number died.

180,000 came from Africa and 16,000 from the Caribbean – with 10,000 from Jamaica alone.

Pacific Islanders – including Fijians, Niueans, Samoans, Tongans, Cook, Gilbert and Alice Islanders – came too.

Blood is red. Whatever the colour of your skin.

Japan kept sea lanes open to the East and China sent tens of thousands of men to man factories, production lines and dig trenches in the UK and Europe.

We have seen their faces frozen in time in history books – grainy black and white images but, in Sir Peter Jackson's new film "They Shall Not Grow Old", through new digital technology and the addition of colour, he has given them life again. It is a haunting masterpiece that ensures we remember them.

We, across nations, races and religions, stood together for common purpose.

And yes, many returned home with a new sense of home. The fight for freedom in a distant land drove their idealism for self-determination and nationhood. In subsequent years colonies became independent sovereign nations. New freedoms were founded in the decades to come.

Yet, in between all of this, another world war drew us back to dark days again. Darkness overcame light, despair replaced hope. World War II, unlike World War I, hit this region hard.

Here in Malaysia, 7,292 headstones stand as sentinels to further sacrifice at Commonwealth War Graves across 35 locations. If one walks between the graves

you will find men of different races. From Indians to Gurkhas, Canadians, Australians, Brits and Kiwis. Brothers in arms. Brothers in death.

And even after peace and the end of war, they came again in defence of this land to keep the threat of Communism at bay in the critical years of 1948-1960 to ensure Malaya's transition to independence and to help ensure a proud new nationhood could be secured.

This was the period known as the Malayan Emergency and this year marks its 70th anniversary.

So, on this Remembrance Sunday, we pay tribute to the brave men and women – military, police and civilian – who played their part. And who paid the price for peace yet again.

And they came again to fight alongside Malaysian forces during the Konfrontasi to safeguard this nation.

The Five Powers Defence Arrangement grew out of this with Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom always at the ready to stand by Singapore and Malaysia in their defence.

In a world where conflicts still rage, where geo-political changes are causing uncertainty, like-minded countries must never be complacent. We must continue to strive for peace and partnership.

We must strive for dialogue and understanding.

We must strive to secure relationships built on trust and understanding.

Otherwise we squander the sacrifices made by those we commemorate today...

... and we fail to understand and apply the lessons of history.

For Britain, as we look forward, whatever BREXIT ends up looking like, I can say this:

We will always stand by Europe as we have done before in her darkest hours.

We will equally continue to have a global outlook.

We will play our part to secure a peaceful and stable world.

We will encourage and support an international rules-based system.

We will argue for dialogue and diplomacy first.

We will work with allies and friends.

And we will seek common ground where we may start from a position of difference.

We owe those we commemorate today that much. But we also owe it to the generations to come to leave them a better world.

That is why we gather here today.

That is why we remember them today.

Lest we forget.