

***The Lord Mayor of London's speech at the Easter Banquet for
Ambassadors and High Commissioners accredited to the Court of
St James – Thursday 9th May 2024***

Your Excellencies. My Lords. Secretary of State. Ministers. Fellow Aldermen. Mr Recorder. Sheriffs. Chief Commoner. Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is our great pleasure to welcome you to Mansion House for the Easter Banquet.

Thank you, especially, to the Foreign Secretary and the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps for joining us this evening.

I am the 695th Lord Mayor of the City of London - a place I like to refer to as the world's oldest democratic workers' and residents' cooperative.

The flag - or *standard* - of the City of London is the St George's Cross...allegedly adopted from our friends in Genoa in 1190 (though we no longer pay them for the privilege).

I am pleased to be the first Italian Lord Mayor, first US-born Lord Mayor, and third Irish Lord Mayor...with four passports, a German Lady Mayoress, a French son, Japanese grandchildren and a daughter who's starting to turn Dutch.

-- *my own* background is a reflection of *our City's* cosmopolitan connections.

We are also very pleased to welcome my predecessor and fellow Irishman, Nicholas Lyons, and his wife, Felicity, back to the City this evening after a six-month period of purdah.

If an "Irish goodbye" refers to someone quietly ducking out of a party without bidding farewell then, tonight, we have the inverse: a very loud and proud "Irish hello!"

I happen to have a bit of a reputation for telling dad jokes.

Did you know the Swiss embassy had its flag stolen last week?

I heard staff were nonplussed.

Do you know what I hate? Double standards.

I mean, one flag is enough, surely?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to celebrate the *invaluable work* diplomats do on the anniversary of two key dates:

On this day, the 9th of May 1386, Portugal and England ratified the Treaty of Windsor, which strengthened their commercial ties and guaranteed the mutual security of both nations.

Enduring to this day, 638 years later, it holds the record for the longest-lasting diplomatic treaty.

The 9th of May is also Europe Day - which marks the anniversary of the historic “Schuman Declaration” of 1950, which set out a vision for a new form of political cooperation in Europe.

Diplomats hold themselves to high standards. And that’s my theme for this evening.

Standards - not a sexy topic, right?

Wrong!

Take electrical mating.

When you hear that satisfying “click” of a male and female connector coming together you know standards are at work...

...USBs *charge*...communications *flow*.

You might wonder why we’re talking about standards but, a world ordered for decades by globalization and geoeconomics has quickly become a world grounded in geopolitical risk.

Today - during a mega-election year - the Israel-Hamas conflict sadly grinds on.

Tensions between Iran and Israel remain high.

The Russo-Ukrainian war has entered its 805th day.

Recent African conflicts have displaced more than 40 million people. And cyberattacks have become more frequent and more severe than ever.

We want to see a world where cities thrive...a world that is open to trade and commerce.

Because, as you all know, trade reaps economic benefits from specialisation and comparative advantage, creates prosperity, distributes success and wealth, and collectively enriches all of our societies and communities.

And trade and commerce are made possible by standards that *smooth the way*.

In an unstable world, international standards define *what great looks like*...setting consistent benchmarks for businesses, consumers and nations that ensure reliability, build trust, simplify choices and make trade between countries *simpler* and *fairer*.

By distilling the wisdom of experts from around the world, standards represent the very best of human innovation and knowledge and *guide* economies in adopting sustainable and ethical practices that make our world a better place.

Columbia University's Professor Anu Bradford coined the term "The Brussels Effect" - that the EU shapes global policies on privacy, safety, antitrust, the environment, and, now, artificial intelligence, not as a superpower, but as the international standard setter.

To quote automotive legend Henry Ford, "*if you think of standardisation as the best that you know today, but which is to be improved tomorrow – you get somewhere.*"

From maritime to aviation to the food industry, standards make the world go round.

Indeed, the FTAs this community negotiates and the FDI you help secure would not be possible without international standards...

...though, as diplomats, you will appreciate the irony of the fact that different nations choose to celebrate World Standards Day on different days.

Another irony –

We refer to the standard common language as the lingua franca.

But the original Lingua Franca - the specific language - is not English, or French, or Italian, but the language of the Franks, a West Germanic dialect spoken between the 5th and the 9th centuries: something our Franconian Lady Mayoress, Elisabeth, reminds me of constantly.

This year's mayoral theme, "Connect To Prosper", celebrates the "Knowledge Miles" of our Square Mile, the "world's coffee house"...

...it's about *leveraging* the power of the City's many connections...including our connections with our international partners...to take on the big challenges facing the world today.

There are 40 learned societies, 70 higher education institutions, 130 research institutes and 24,000 businesses within two miles of the City. With these and a dynamic workforce that speaks more than 300 languages, the City is, arguably, the world's *most connected* commercial centre.

And, with 111 livery companies representing different professions, trades and crafts - some of which can trace their origins to the 8th century - we know a thing or two about maintaining standards.

All six of our key "Connect To Prosper" initiatives promote international standards.

The **695th Lord Mayor's Ethical AI Initiative** offers ethics courses for professionals working in AI (which have, so far, had more than 5,000 participants, from 500 organisations, across 50 countries), and it will also bring more than 30 countries together in Brussels next week to conclude the "Walbrook AI Accord" promoting ISO 42001.

Our **Space Protection Initiative** is a combined technology and financial services programme to use space debris removal insurance bonds to keep space "clutter free", meeting international space sustainability standards.

The **Smart Economy Networks Initiative** seeks to deploy international “open data” and identity standards in business and trade, using X-Road infrastructure donated to the world by Estonia.

Our **Constructing Science: Offices to Labs Initiative** has created and is promoting the international standard for converting commercial premises to life sciences facilities.

GALENOS is a multimillion-pound Oxford University-led programme across 70 countries that is improving standards in mental health research.

And, *finally*, our **Green Finance Initiative** advocates standards for voluntary carbon markets, nature markets, carbon offtake agreements, and sovereign sustainability-linked bonds.

Each of your nations supports the quest for strong international standards.

The Policy Chairman, Chris Hayward, and I have travelled to the United Arab Emirates, the US, Switzerland, Ireland, India, China, France, Italy, and Saudi Arabia since November...

...and we’re looking forward to trips to Japan, Singapore, the Netherlands, Germany and Brussels in the coming months.

We couldn’t be more appreciative of the great “Connect To Prosper” hospitality we have been shown.

Our travels have reinforced the fact that our nations share many of the same ambitions:

...from realising the full potential of new technology, to combatting climate change.

The United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals need global solutions.

Global solutions need global discussions.

Reflecting on the tradition of writers, artists, scientists and traders meeting in the Square Mile’s coffee houses to debate issues of the day, I

affectionately refer to modern-day London and the UK as “the world’s coffee house”:

...a place for global discussions...where all comers are welcome, new ideas are encouraged, and culture and commerce sit side by side.

I accept that the UK doesn’t *produce* the most coffee - that's Brazil.

I accept the UK doesn’t *consume* the most coffee - that's Finland.

And I accept the UK doesn’t *have* the best coffee - that, in my humble opinion, is Italy.

However, the UK *is* the world’s coffee house.

Appropriately, I have a small token - the mayoral coffee spoon - for the Foreign Secretary and the Dean.

In a world of misinformation and disinformation, we are seeing what happens when standards start to slip.

I believe that, working alongside all of you, the City of London has a role to play in maintaining and creating international standards that offer stability and security, promote trade and investment, and put us a step closer to achieving our shared goals.

Friends, you do an excellent job of *flying the flag* for your nations.

We must continue to work together to keep *raising standards* for the benefit of mankind, thank you.