Presiding Officer’s Speech

Rt Hon George Reid MSP,
Presiding Officer
Your Majesty,
Our Queen of Scots:

That Gaelic psalm exhorts the people to come to the city, to the place where the laws are made.

A place that shapes the future. A place where to the hills we can lift our eyes - as we do in this Chamber - and look forward with ambition and confidence.

A place where the ears of the politicians are open to the voices of the people.

Today the ‘folk’ of Scotland have come to the city, to the place where the laws are made, in a tradition that stretches back at least five centuries.

We come together - People, Parliament and Palace - as the community of this realm.

We meet at Holyrood, in a world heritage site - where a thousand years of our history in the Royal Mile fuses with our land.

Long before any of us, in the green of what is now Holyrood Park came Arthur’s Seat and the Salisbury Crags - formed 350-million years ago in the volcanic eruptions which gave shape to Scotland.

Iron and Bronze Age families lived here. Our early kings, Mary Queen of Scots, James VI, Bonnie Prince Charlie, Adam Smith, David Hume - the economists, philosophers and scientists of the Scottish Enlightenment who largely invented the modern world - have all, on their way down the Canongate, been here before us.

In his inner sanctum on this site, the Duke of Queensberry plotted the end of the old Scots Parliament. That room is now - in a rounding of history - where the Presiding Officer of the new Scottish Parliament does his work.

So this building - designed like the leaves of a plant whose green stems stretch out to the hills - is both rooted in our land and intertwined with Scotland ‘s story.

Holyrood does not stand apart, in splendid isolation. Our architecture is domestic, not patrician. Our people live right beside us. Next door, the children of the Canongate school in their playground. Across the road, a residence for Scotland ‘s old soldiers. Round the corner, opposite the Palace, our doors open to the 750,000 guests - the majority of Scots - whom we expect in the next year.

This Parliament belongs to its people. It has been built to invite them in. Designed said Enric Miralles, as a place of shared conversation - not of sterile confrontation.
It is a place where, together, we can be ambitious for Scotland. Where we face the challenge of building a country comfortable with itself at home, and at ease with itself in Britain, Europe and the wider world.

An enterprising and compassionate Scotland

A place where now, with devolution, if we make mistakes they are our mistakes - and we can no longer blame anyone else.

A place where we know our enemy. And have the wisdom understand that often it is us.

A Scotland where we face our fear of failure. Where we confront that Caledonian cringe which merely reinforces doubt. Where we are not prisoners of our past but the cause of what happens next.

There are plenty of voices, sent to us by the readers of our local newspapers, to spur us on.

Alexander Gray – “This is my country, the land that begat me”

Hugh McDiarmid – “Our - Scotland small? Our multiform, our infinite Scotland small?”

And the Proclaimers, in an echo of Robert Burns – “We’re all Scotland ’s story and we’re all worth the same”

Our land and our history have shaped us as an egalitarian society, reflected in our founding principles of Accessibility, Accountability, Equality of Opportunities, and the sharing of power between our government, parliament and people.

These are the real foundation stones of this new Parliament.

If we listen to the building, it will help us. This is not a place where, like Westminster, we sit two swords lengths’ apart. It is a campus where Committees are as important as the Chamber. It is a village, a cluster of different spaces designed for dialogue. It says to all - our wealth creators, thinkers, civic and voluntary Scotland, the whole community of the realm – “Come on in”.

This is the place where Scotland 's horizons should be stretched, not squeezed.

Our new Scottish Parliament building, as our first First Minister put it, is not an end in itself. It is simply a means to greater ends.

For it is here at Holyrood, in Donald's words, that we Scots of this and future generations say “who we are and how we carry ourselves”.