



OPENING REMARKS

45 Millbank, London SW1
Friday 7 June 2013

HE Mr Anthony Bailey, OBE, GCSS

Grand Magistral Delegate for Inter-Religious Relations and Delegate
for Great Britain and Ireland of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order
of St George

MR PRESIDENT, FIRST LADY,
YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESSES,
YOUR SERENE HIGHNESS,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES,
YOUR EMINENCES,
YOUR GRACE,
FIELD MARSHAL,
MY LORDS,
ALDERMAN,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

As Delegate, together with my co-host, the Colombian Ambassador, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all here today.

It is a privilege for me to greet our distinguished guests, the President and First Lady of Colombia, together with their delegation including the Minister of Finance.

May I also warmly welcome the 59th Grand Master of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, His Royal Highness Prince Charles of Bourbon Two Sicilies, Duke of Castro and his wife, Princess Camilla, Duchess of Castro, who are accompanied by Ambassador Giuseppe Balboni Acqua.

Your Excellencies, Your Royal Highnesses, you honour us by being here and are most welcome in Britain during what is an auspicious week for our nation as we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Coronation of our Queen, Elizabeth II.

And, if I may say so, also during a week when we have been blessed with that long awaited and equally rare thing – a glorious sunny day in London – no doubt to herald the arrival of our distinguished Colombian and Italian guests.

I am delighted that so many ambassadors and other members of the diplomatic corps are present today representing some 42 countries and international organisations.

As a religious order, I am also pleased to welcome senior members of our nation's diverse religious communities including our Sub Prior, His Grace the Most Reverend George Stack, Archbishop of Cardiff, Their Eminences the Archbishops and Heads of the Russian and Syriac Orthodox Churches and other representatives of the Greek and Anglican Churches, Muslim and Jewish communities and others friends. You are all most welcome.

The Constantinian Order of Saint George is an ancient Order of Knighthood that is recognised worldwide and from its earliest origins has resolved to work for the glorification of the Cross, the propagation of the Faith and the defence of the Holy Roman Church.

Today, the Constantinian Order manifests these principles through hospitalier and humanitarian assistance as well as the charitable relief of the poor and those most vulnerable in society.

Uniquely, among Catholic orders the Constantinian Order and its sister Order, the Royal Order of Francis I, continues to play a significant role across the world in furthering inter-religious understanding between the followers of all faiths and of none. We remain true to our heritage yet are proud of our diversity.

Mr President you recently said, that "you must fight to achieve peace". This is why we have assembled here to pay tribute to you today, because as you strive to bring an end to the longstanding conflict in your country, you also acknowledge that the peace is much more than just an end to the violence, as you embark on a fight against poverty, making the social agenda a top priority and sowing the wider seeds of a lasting peace.

Indeed, similar to the teachings of Mother Laura Montoya, the first Colombian born saint, canonised in Vatican City last month of whom Pope Francis said,

“she teaches us to see Jesus’ face reflected in others, to overcome indifference and selfishness, which corrode our hearts, and to embrace everyone without prejudice, without discrimination, and without reticence, but with sincere love, giving them the best of ourselves and above all sharing with them what we have that is most precious – Christ and His Gospel.”

When you met with the Holy Father a few weeks ago, His Holiness remarked how “Only the brave insist that these type of goals be accomplished” yet that “they come at a cost, but they are worthwhile.”

Here in Britain, we understand all too well that cost, having in recent years successfully concluded the delicate and drawn out negotiations to end our own Troubles in Northern Ireland which impacted so profoundly on these islands.

Given the remarkable and successful outcome to date, I am delighted to know that some of those involved in securing our peace are now offering their assistance to the peace talks talking place in Cuba.

It is fitting therefore to remember that among the previous recipients of the Grand Cross which you are about to receive include the then President Mary McAleese of Ireland, a tireless campaigner for peace, who described the theme of her Presidency as “building bridges” as she reached out to all communities, often amid much criticism too.

It was the late Baroness Margaret Thatcher, another recipient of our Order, who also famously quoted St Francis of Assisi on her re-election, “Where there is discord, may we bring harmony. Where there is error, may we bring truth. Where there is doubt, may we bring faith. And where there is despair, may we bring hope.”

In that spirit it is therefore, my signal honour to invite our Grand Master, The Duke of Castro, to present you, Mr President, with the insignia of the Knight Grand Cross with Gold Star within the Special Category of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George for his

“significant contribution to peace and reconciliation in Colombia and in recognition of your faith inspired contribution to the alleviation of poverty and its associated problems”.

And also, First Lady, as a Dame Grand Cross with Gold Star within the Special Category of the Constantinian Order of Saint George for your

“longstanding contribution to charitable and humanitarian endeavour in Colombia with special reference to improvement of early childhood welfare, her response to those affected by the 2010-2011 severe flooding and other social programmes ”.

Thank you.