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Official Opening of Scottish Parliament

**First Minister
Scottish Parliament
2 July 2016**

Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Presiding Officer, fellow members of Parliament and distinguished guests.

Today is a day to celebrate our strength, our ambition and our unity.

This is a day to come together.

A day to look forward with hope.

Your Majesty, first and foremost, we want to thank you most sincerely for affording us the honour of opening the fifth session of our Parliament, and for your thoughtful address.

On behalf of everyone in this Chamber - and indeed on behalf of all of the people of Scotland - I would also like to wish your Majesty a very happy 90th birthday year.

Your Majesty, your lifetime of service to others, to your country and the Commonwealth; your deep sense of duty, dignity and respect; and your firm and constant support and affection for Scotland are an inspiration to all of us - and we thank you for it.

Today marks the formal opening of this, the fifth term of our national parliament.

All of us elected to this magnificent chamber feel a deep sense of honour in the trust that the people of Scotland have placed in us.

We come from a diverse variety of backgrounds, but all of us have been given the precious opportunity to contribute to building a better country.

And build it we will.

To do so, we must be bold and ambitious. We must show courage and determination.

Our collective commitment to the people of Scotland today is that we will not shy away from any challenge we face - no matter how difficult or deep-rooted.

We must seek to extend opportunity for everyone, at every stage of their lives.

And as parliamentarians, we must always remember our duty to lead by example - with open, honest and good-spirited debate and discussion;

our duty to be a voice for all the people of our country.

When Scotland's first First Minister, the late Donald Dewar addressed this Parliament at its opening 17 years ago, he delivered one of the finest speeches of our times. He said then that a Scottish Parliament 'is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves.'

So allow me to reflect on who we are in Scotland today.

We are more than five million men and women - adults, young people and children - each with our own life stories, family histories and our own hopes and dreams.

We are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the thousands who came from Ireland to work in our shipyards and our factories.

We are the 80,000 Polish people, the 8,000 Lithuanians, the 7,000 each from France, Spain, Germany, Italy and Latvia, who are among the many from countries beyond our shores that we are so privileged to have living here amongst us.

We are the more than half a million people born in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, who have chosen to live in Scotland.

We are the thousands of European students studying at our universities and colleges.

And we are the doctors and nurses from all across our continent and beyond who care for us daily in our National Health Service.

Whether we have lived here for generations or are new Scots, from Europe, India, Pakistan, Africa and countries across the globe, we are all of this, and more.

We are so much stronger for the diversity that shapes us.

We are one Scotland and we are simply home to all those who choose to live here.

That is who and what we are.

And how do we carry ourselves?

We carry ourselves with dignity. We treat others with respect. We celebrate our differences. We are not perfect - far from it - and we make mistakes. But every day – especially in adversity or sadness – we should seek to offer a hand to our neighbour.

A few weeks ago, all of Scotland – including leaders from across this Chamber – stood in solidarity with the victims of the Orlando massacre.

And, today, we fly the Rainbow flag outside our Parliament. We do so with poignancy, but also with great pride - it is yet another vivid illustration and powerful symbol of the open and inclusive nation we are.

The open and inclusive nation we are determined to remain.

This is the Scotland we represent - a country we should never take for granted but instead work hard each and every day to protect and to strengthen.

This Parliament now has the weighty responsibility of taking forward the will of our people in the name and in the spirit of our people.

So let us lead with hope and determination and make this resolution.

We will work every day to achieve greater equality at home and to enhance, and never diminish, our precious place in the world.

We have just heard the inspiring words of our wonderful new Makar, Jackie Kay.

Let me now finish with the words of her predecessor, Liz Lochhead. These words are from ‘Connecting Cultures’, a poem written by Liz to celebrate Commonwealth Day.

These words resonate powerfully, as we think about who we are and as we reflect on our place in the European Union and in the wider world.

Remembering how hard fellow feeling is to summon

When Wealth is what we do not have in Common,

May every individual

And all the peoples in each nation

Work and hope and

Strive for true communication --

Only by a shift and sharing is there any chance

For the Welfare of all our people and Good Governance.

So today, as we celebrate this new beginning, let us look forward with hope and a shared determination to work tirelessly for the good of all of Scotland’s people - and in doing so, to play our part in a stronger Europe and a better world.