

**A SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC,  
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, AT THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY DINNER OF  
THE ROTARY CLUB OF LAUNCESTON WEST, LAUNCESTON  
SATURDAY, 12<sup>th</sup> MAY 2012.**

Thank you for asking me to join you for this special 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner. I have always had a soft spot for Rotary because my father was a keen member of the Launceston Rotary Club for many years and my mother was a member of the Inner Wheel. So I am well aware of the tremendous support that Rotary gives both to local communities and internationally. And there is no doubt that this Rotary Club has more than pulled its weight in the 40 years that have passed since the Club received its Charter on 13 May 1972 at a dinner at the Hotel Tasmania. Although your membership is not large you have been an incredibly active club with members travelling to places like PNG, Fiji and the Solomon Islands. You've supported international youth exchange programmes and international group study exchange, as well as the jewel in Rotary's International Crown - the wonderful polio eradication programme. On the home front you have been very busy over the 40 years since your inception, raising funds for a wide variety of projects too numerous to spell out tonight. You have provided ongoing support to the City Mission for the Star House and Missiondale projects thereby helping young people who have fallen by the wayside to get on their feet again. So, over the 40 years of this Club's existence there has been a fine spirit of altruism and a great deal achieved of which you should feel very proud, and as Governor of Tasmania I would like to say on behalf of the beneficiaries of your service thank you for

the difference that you have made. Happy birthday and long may the Rotary Club of Launceston West prosper.

Now I was invited to address you tonight but given no brief. I suggested to my wife that you would be thrilled to hear my 3-hour dissertation on the rule of law and the history of the development of the independence of the judiciary and was frankly amazed when she said that she didn't think that that was a very good idea. She even went so far as to contradict me when I protested that I was sure that it was always a favourite with the law students.

But I usually heed her advice and as I am the Queen's representative in the State of Tasmania and as this year we celebrate the Queen's Jubilee as the Queen of Australia and the Head of the State I thought instead I might say a few words about Her Majesty and her contribution to the development of this country. This is how her long reign began.

During the night of 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> February sixty years ago King George VI, emaciated by cancer, died in his sleep, and at noon on Friday 8<sup>th</sup> February 1952 Sir Ronald Cross, then the Governor of Tasmania proclaimed the accession of Her Most Gracious Majesty QUEEN ELIZABETH THE SECOND. According to his advice sent to the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations Sir Ronald made his proclamation, and I quote, "at Hobart ...with fitting solemnity and ceremony in the presence of State Ministers, Judges of the

Supreme Court, Members of both Houses of Parliament and a large public concourse." The proclamation commenced with these words:

*"WHEREAS it has pleased Almighty God to call to His Mercy our late Sovereign Lord King George the Sixth of Blessed and Glorious memory, by whose Decease the Crown is solely and rightfully come to the High and Mighty Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary."*

In elaborate language the proclamation then recited the identities of those who were present at the reading of the proclamation and went on to assert that those persons:

*"do now hereby with one voice and consent of tongue and heart, publish and proclaim that the High and Mighty Princess ELIZABETH ALEXANDRA MARY is now, by the death of Our late Sovereign of happy memory become QUEEN ELIZABETH THE SECOND ...."*<sup>1</sup>

Similar proclamations were made by the Privy Councillors in London, by the Governor General in Canberra and by the Governors of the other States of Australia and in all the other Realms of the Commonwealth.

At the time of her accession to the throne Queen Elizabeth was on tour in Africa. She hastened home, donned her grieving black and

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<sup>1</sup> Tasmanian Government Gazette Vol CXCVIII, Friday February 8, 1952.

went straight to Buckingham Palace to sign the accession papers. There she declared:

“ ...

*My heart is too full for me to say more to you today than that I shall always work as my father did throughout his reign to uphold constitutional Government and to advance the happiness and prosperity of my peoples spread as they are all the world over. I know that in my resolve to follow his shining example of service and devotion I shall be inspired by the loyalty and affection of those whose Queen I have been called to be and by the counsel of their elected Parliaments.”<sup>2</sup>*

And so began the remarkable reign of Queen Elizabeth II, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which we now celebrate. She was then only 25 years of age. She had been married for not more than 5 years and was the mother of a 4-year old boy, Charles, and a 2-year-old girl, Anne. By her father’s death she ascended the throne of the United Kingdom and its realms and without apparent demur she embraced a life of duty and obligation. Today she remains the Queen of the United Kingdom and is now the constitutional Monarch of 16 sovereign states, known as the Commonwealth Realms, one of which is Australia, as well as the titular head of 54 countries that go to make up the Commonwealth of Nations. Now in her 86<sup>th</sup> year she still maintains a busy schedule of her own. She handles roughly 430

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<sup>2</sup> Supra.

engagements each year and supports more than 600 charitable organizations and programs. She has, and I quote “inherited a rich traditional legacy, has earned unsurpassed personal respect by a solid strength of character, uncommon emotional composure and statesmanlike responsiveness to change.”<sup>3</sup>

With respect to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II no one would doubt that she is a remarkable woman, a great moral leader and role model for us all. The State of Tasmania came into existence with the federation of the colonies 111 years ago and Queen Elizabeth II has been our Head of State and the Queen of Australia for 60 of those 111 years. That is a long time and whether you think that it is time that Australia became a Republic or not you have to admire this woman who all her life has adhered to the pledge that she made at the time of her father’s death and to the pledge that she made when she was just 21 years of age when she said, “I declare before you all that my whole life, be it long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of that great Imperial family to which we all belong.”

According to a commentator writing in the New York Times on 10<sup>th</sup> January this year, “Britain has been remarkably lucky in its ruling queens. Only a handful of women have held the throne in their own right over the British monarchy’s long history, stretching back

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<sup>3</sup> <http://asiwajubolatinubu.com/archives/news/2001/04/25/20010425N01.html>

twelve centuries, but what queens they were: the remarkable Elizabeth I, who saw off the Armada in 1588 and set the country on its unique path to greatness; Victoria, on whose empire .... the sun never set; and now Elizabeth II, who has seen that empire transformed into a Commonwealth and her country remade into a more modern kind of world power, in finance and the arts, democracy and diplomacy and diversity".<sup>4</sup>

Those who celebrate the Queen's Jubilee have much to celebrate. Tasmania is one of Her Majesty's Realms and consequently we have inherited a long, firmly established and stable form of government called a constitutional monarchy which, as Her Majesty declared at the time of her accession, obliges her and her representatives in the Realms to receive and act upon the advice of those who have been democratically elected to the parliament except in the most unusual circumstances. So it is for Her Majesty's representatives in each State and in Canberra. This system of government has proved to be robust even in times of political disputation as, sometimes happens for example when an election fails to deliver a clear majority to one party. Even in extremely tense times such as those that surrounded the dismissal of Prime Minister Whitlam by Governor-General in 1975 the decision of the Queen's Representative did not lead to violence and conflict in the streets as it

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<sup>4</sup> New York Times January 10<sup>th</sup> 2012 <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/12/20/elizabeth-ii-outlives-victoria-today/>

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so often does in so many of the countries that do not enjoy the same stability of government as do the Queen's Realms.

Her Majesty is not only the Queen of our country and the head of each of the Australian States but she is also the human face of the system of government that we enjoy. I believe that by her conduct, steadfastness, moral rectitude, honesty, tolerance and adherence to tested principle for sixty long years, she has become the personification of a system of good government that gives us peace and security. That is a cause to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee. On a personal level her adherence to those same values makes her a role model for us all and that too is a cause to celebrate her Diamond Jubilee. Respect and admiration for her Majesty and the system of government that she conducts and believes in is widespread in this country, even amongst those who argue that it is time we became a republic.

So on the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Her Majesty's accession to the throne of the United Kingdom and her Realms let us express our gratitude to her for sixty years of exemplary leadership, for 60 years of service dedicated to the well-being of her subjects and for the maintenance of a peaceful and democratic system of government. Let us wish her good health, happiness and an even longer reign.

