

## **Christmas Message from His Majesty the King**

La Zarzuela Palace. Madrid, 24 December 2014

Good evening.

I would firstly like to thank you all for inviting me into your homes this Christmas Eve. A time, above all, for closeness and reunions, when we gather together with the will and hope of understanding each other, to share our feelings of love, peace and joy with those around us.

Today, in my first Christmas message, I want to join with you to reflect on our future, with our confidence high and our sights set on 2015.

We are going through some complicated times which are hard for many people, and for Spain in general. This long, harsh economic crisis means that many families are uncertain about their futures; some of our political problems are significant and worrying; and the inappropriate conduct of certain public servants has quite reasonably left many indignant and disillusioned.

These problems have given rise to great concern among society. However, we must not give in to pessimism, social unrest or despair; we need to deal firmly and effectively with the causes of these problems, resolve them and recover the peace of mind which a democratic society like our own needs and deserves.

Last October in Asturias, I said that we need moral standards we can admire, ethical principles we can recognise, and civic values we can uphold. I said then that as a society, we needed to push hard for moral values. And now I want to add that we need to regenerate our society at the deepest level. And the fight against corruption is an essential goal in this task.

It is true that those responsible for this undesirable conduct are now answering for it; this is proof that our State of Law is working. It is also true that the great majority of public servants carry out their work honourably and with the desire to serve the public interest.

But it is also necessary and essential not to let unethical behaviour become rooted in our society, and not to let it happen again. The public needs to be sure that public money is used for the purposes established by law, that a position of public responsibility does not lead to special favours, that government jobs are not a way to profit from advantages or to become rich, and that our prestige and reputation in the eyes of the world are not besmirched.

Few subjects provoke such unanimous opinions. We must root corruption out, uncompromisingly. The honesty of public servants is a cornerstone of community living, in a Spain which is healthy and clean.

I also wanted to talk to you about the economy, because this is still a serious cause for concern to all of us. Unemployment rates are still unacceptable and are frustrating the hopes of our young people, and many more men and women who have been unemployed for some time. It is true that we have world-leading companies in many sectors, but it is also true that our economy has still not been able to correct this basic imbalance.

However, it is a fact, and a very positive one, that the main macroeconomic figures are improving and that we have recovered economic growth and job creation. These figures are a new basis for the hope that in the future many more jobs will be sustainably created, and quality jobs in particular.

So it is obvious that combating unemployment must remain our main priority. The sacrifice and efforts of the public throughout the economic crisis must oblige political, economic and social agents to work together unstintingly in this direction, with the public interest at the top of the agenda. Because the economy must always exist to serve people.

For this reason we must especially protect the least fortunate and the most vulnerable among us, and to do that, we must safeguard our welfare state. During the years of crisis, the welfare state has kept society together, alongside families, volunteer movements and charity associations. This is something we can really be proud of.

I would now like to turn to the current situation in Catalonia.

The people of Spain, in the exercise of their national sovereignty, ratified by referendum the 1978 Constitution, which proclaimed our historical and political unity and recognised the right of all of us to have our own cultures, traditions, languages and institutions, and for these to be respected.

Since then, we have all lived together in the spirit of the Constitution. Every region, town and territory of Spain and all their citizens have contributed the best of themselves, for the benefit of all of us. And there can be no doubt that Catalonia has contributed to the political stability of all of Spain, and to its economic progress.

It is obvious that we all need each other. We form part of a common stem, in which we each complement all the others, yet we are all essential for the progress of each individual unit and for all of them as a whole.

But this is not merely an economic issue, but also, and more importantly, an emotional one.

Millions of Spaniards have Catalonia close to our hearts, just as for millions of Catalans, the other people of Spain are part of their being. Hence, it pains me and concerns me to see emotional rifts, distance or rejection among families, friends or citizens. Nobody in the Spain of today is anyone's adversary.

And what makes Spain uniquely strong as a nation is the sum of all our differences, which we must understand and respect, and which should always bring us together, not drive us apart. Because everything we have achieved together comes from the strength of unity. And it is this strength in unity which will enable us to go further and do more in a world which does not accept weakness or division in societies, and which is on the path to greater integration.

Lack of understanding cannot be resolved by emotional or sentimental rifts. Let us all make a sincere, loyal effort and come together in what we should never lose: mutual affection and the feelings we all share. Let us respect the Constitution, which is a guarantee of orderly democratic coexistence in peace and freedom. And let us keep building a project together which respects our plurality and creates hope and trust for the future.

Because we also need hope and trust.

Last June, Spain gave the world and itself an example of responsibility and dignity in the process of the abdication of my father, King Juan Carlos, and my proclamation as King, in accordance with our Constitution. And over these last months you have embraced me with your respect, affection and good will. I can say with sincerity that I have felt loved and appreciated, and I am truly grateful to you. And I must also tell you that I have seen many of you expressing hope, in your words and in your faces, at the start of a new era in our history.

It is true that these times are complex and difficult. There can be no doubt. But these are also times we must tackle with responsibility, enthusiasm and the will to begin again. New times are ahead in every area of our collective and individual lives. And now we, the people of today's Spain, must continue the task of creating our best future; which is beginning now, has already begun.

Fortunately, we have something to build upon. We should not forget what we have achieved together, with hard work and sacrifice, over generations. This is something substantial that we should be proud of.

But we must also take responsibility for correcting mistakes and for enhancing the assets of today's Spain, as we look towards a future which belongs to all Spaniards.

We are an established democracy. We enjoy a political stability like never before in our history. The framework of our Constitution has allowed governments to change based on free, democratic elections. We are also a nation which is respected and appreciated the world over, with a deep connection with other peoples, essential for the promotion of our culture and for safeguarding our interests in a globalised world. Today more than ever, we are a fundamental part of a new Europe which makes us stronger, more competitive, and more decisive in a future of integration.

As I said in my proclamation address, every political period has its own challenges. We must continue to make progress in our political coexistence, step by step, adapting it to the needs of our times. Updating the running of our democratic society and encouraging the public to once again trust in our institutions. Vigorous institutions, full of vitality, which they can feel belong to them.

I would like to conclude with a message of hope.

Regenerating our political life, regaining public confidence in our institutions, safeguarding our welfare state and preserving our unity from a standpoint of plurality are our great challenges. These are not easy tasks. But I am certain we are going to accomplish them. We have more than the skills and the courage we need. We also have the will. And now we have to add trust and self-confidence.

This is the key to our hopes for the future. The key to restoring pride in our national consciousness as a modern Spain with deeply rooted democratic convictions, diverse, open to the world, supportive, energetic, determined. With this determination and the example set by all of you as you struggle against adversity to get ahead and improve your lives and those of your families with honest work. And I will always be by your side in this; here, first and foremost, to serve the people of Spain.

Thank you again for listening to me tonight, and please accept the good wishes of the Queen, the Princess of Asturias and Princess Sofía.

Feliz Navidad, Eguberri on, Bon Nadal, Boas Festas, Merry Christmas.