

**Remarks by His Majesty The King at the reception for the
Diplomatic Corps accredited in Spain
Madrid, 31 January 2018**

I would like to thank the Nuncio of His Holiness for his remarks as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. Please allow me to wish you, on behalf of the Queen, of the government of Spain, of the people of Spain, and on my own behalf, all the best for the year ahead. I would also ask you to extend my best wishes to your Heads of State, your governments and your citizens.

I wish to begin these remarks by expressly restating Spain's firm commitment to the values and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which find their highest expression in respect for and promotion of human rights and the dignity of the human person.

As proof of this commitment, on 1 January Spain began its mandate as a member of the Human Rights Council. We will live up to the trust that the international community has placed in us by giving the best of ourselves, and we will do so out of our deep-rooted conviction. In particular, our country will bolster the fight against the death penalty; the promotion of the rights of people with disabilities; the fight against discrimination; the defence and promotion of economic, social and cultural rights, including new rights such as the right to safe drinking water and sanitation; the promotion of democracy and the rule of law; and the fight against racism, xenophobia and hate crimes.

Today, terrorism constitutes one of the cruellest threats to human rights and dignity. The tragic attacks on 17 August last year in Barcelona and Cambrils, and many others that have hit—and continue to hit—other places in the world, highlight the need for the fight against terrorism to remain a top foreign policy priority. As must the recognition of its victims. Spain is fostering the adoption of an international statute for victims of terrorism, and at the United Nations we contributed to the adoption, in 2017, of the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, commemorated on 21 August each year.

Moreover, Spain continues to participate actively in the International Coalition against Daesh, as well as providing military and police training for Iraqi forces. This commitment will continue, and be strengthened, in 2018, and the good results make us proud of the role played by our Armed Forces and our State Security Forces in those missions.

But, as you well know, other threats facing our global community are no less troubling. Spain has condemned, in the firmest terms, both the conducting of nuclear tests and the launching of ballistic missiles. We will continue to defend the practical application of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as the basic international instrument to achieve total nuclear disarmament, prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and guarantee the right to peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Furthermore, as a member of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), Spain has been striving to bring those responsible for using these forbidden weapons to account. I also wish to highlight and express my gratitude for the designation of a Spanish diplomat as the next OPCW Director-General.

As part of our commitment to collective security, Spain has decided to participate in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). We are also participating in all of the EU's military missions, we have been a reliable and committed NATO ally for more than 35 years, and we will continue as such.

Cooperation to overcome inequality, commitment to a sustainable development model, and the fight against the adverse effects of climate change are all essential in promoting the security, prosperity and well-being of our peoples, as well as for the very survival of our planet. Therefore, we are participating, with enthusiasm and responsibility, in the launching of the 2030 Agenda, in its three facets: economic, social and environmental.

We will continue to prove our country's solidarity. In 2018, our Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation will be 30 years old. I want to congratulate and express my immense gratitude to those heading the Agency, and to everyone who has worked there. I would also like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to our NGOs and our civil society for their work over these years in combating poverty and addressing humanitarian emergencies. The Queen has also had many opportunities to witness their work on the ground. Her support and commitment, for example during her recent trip to Senegal, is very helpful, and follows a tradition that is particularly dear to my heart.

Culture in all its expressions, science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship are also essential vehicles for our foreign policy; we will continue to promote them through actors such as Instituto Cervantes and Marca España. At the same time, we are heightening our presence on social media and in the information society, in which our language is thriving.

Spain is an open, plural and committed country, which contributes—and wishes to contribute even further—to collective security; to responding to major crises, such as the refugee and migrant crisis; to creating, ultimately, a more equitable and sustainable world.

We are, above all, aware of the value of democracy and of the rule of law. I wish to thank the international community for its unwavering support of Spain during the most serious crisis that we have had to face in our recent history. A crisis that has put a strain on values and principles that are not only Spanish, but European and universal: the value of coexistence and harmony in diversity, and the value of respect for democracy and the rule of law.

That is why we, the people of Spain, are enthusiastic advocates of the European project. A project that is at a decisive crossroads, where what is needed is clear vision and strong leadership.

The European Union's most immediate challenge is the United Kingdom's exit. Faced with this decision, which we respect—albeit with sorrow—our priority is to defend citizens' rights and the EU's interests. Spain would like to see an agreement that is as ambitious as possible, and that will allow our companies and economic operators to continue working with their British partners, guaranteeing the greatest possible freedom of movement and establishment for citizens of the EU and of the UK.

But negotiating Brexit, despite its complexity and importance, cannot lead us to neglect our common European future. In 2018, Spain will continue to spearhead the countries promoting the necessary reforms for the European project, and will do so realistically, and responding to our people's aspirations. But also resolutely, because we are convinced that we must learn lessons from the crisis and strengthen the elements that proved to be weak at that time.

The future of the European Union is to be a global player, beginning with its immediate neighbours to the South and to the East. What is needed, here too, is more and better Europe. In our Southern Neighbourhood, the Euro-Mediterranean area is an opportunity for the European Union to work for our shared security and prosperity. In our Eastern Neighbourhood, the Eastern Partnership is a key instrument of European external policy. We wish to have a constructive relationship with Russia, which may allow us to advance in the creation of a Euro-Asian space, based on mutual trust and respect.

Our European nature and vocation are fully coherent with our Ibero-American nature. Europe and the Americas are, through Spain, communicating vessels, shared spaces and projects, partners who talk to and respect each other, even though we may at times have differences of opinion.

This past year, the balance of trips and visits between Ibero-American and Spanish authorities has been extraordinary. The Presidents of Uruguay, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina, Costa Rica and Peru have all honoured us with their presence in Spain. For their part, Spanish authorities have also travelled to the region with notable frequency, and we intend to maintain this pace during the year ahead.

The 26th Ibero-American summit will be held in November in La Antigua Guatemala. This summit has an important agenda, under the theme “A prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Ibero-America”, and with its sights firmly set on the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Precisely because of this dual European and American identity, Spain has always been a staunch and active advocate of strengthening the ties between Ibero-America and Europe. In 2017, notable advances were made in the negotiations for the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, in the modernization of the EU-Mexico Global Agreement, and in the initiation of the Association Agreement with Chile.

The United States is an essential ally of Spain and one of our main economic partners. Our relations, which date back to the foundation of that great American nation, are characterized by their continuity and the quality of our shared values and interests. This was underlined during the meeting in Washington, last September, between the President of the Spanish Government and the President of the USA. And this year there will be no lack of opportunities to foster political contacts and strengthen the trust between our two countries.

I am referring here to the 30th anniversary of the signing of the Bilateral Agreement on Defence Cooperation, which constitutes a particularly valuable contribution to shared security. I would also like to mention the 300th anniversary of the foundation of the cities of San Antonio and New Orleans, an unquestionably timely occasion to showcase and celebrate our historical ties and our numerous opportunities for current and future cooperation in multiple fields.

As regards Canada, I would like to highlight the provisional entry into force of the agreement signed with the European Union last September, which opens up highly promising outlooks for the growth of trade and investments in that country.

North Africa, and the Maghreb in particular, is a priority strategic region for Spain’s foreign action. Its proximity, its political, cultural and economic relevance, and the existence of significant Maghrebi communities in Spain all make the stability and prosperity of the Mediterranean’s southern rim—in particular, of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia—decisive for our country. I particularly hope that during this year Libya will find a political solution to its crisis and recover its stability.

We also hope for a political solution to the conflicts, both recent and long-standing, in the Near East. The visits to our country by the Presidents of Israel and Palestine enabled us to reaffirm our desire that they will soon reach a mutually beneficial agreement on the core issues of the Peace Process, including the status of Jerusalem as a shared capital.

Africa is an increasingly relevant geographical space for our country, as it is for the entire international community. It not only holds promise for the future, but also for the present—there is much we can and must do to give greater focus to this ever-fascinating continent; to listen more and pay closer attention to its needs, its major problems, and its immense potential for the world. It is today, and will be increasingly in the future, one of the priorities of our foreign policy.

This reality has led us to reformulate our strategic framework towards Sub-Saharan Africa. This new approach is based on four priorities: firstly, contributing to peace and security in the region as a prerequisite for its development; secondly, underpinning institutions so that they may reach higher levels of democracy, openness and respect for human rights; thirdly, propitiating sustainable growth and employment, mobilizing all available resources; and, fourthly, promoting the appropriate management of migratory flows, not only outward, but also, above all, within the continent itself.

But as you well know, Spain's global aspirations date back centuries. This is why we attach such importance to our relations with the countries of Asia and the Pacific, with whom we are forging ever closer ties. In 2017, the Queen and I made a State visit to Japan— our first visit to Asia as King and Queen. Also in 2017, the Prime Minister of India made an important working visit to Spain which laid the groundwork for extensive bilateral cooperation for the coming years. Similarly, last year the President of the Spanish Government participated, in Beijing, in the first New Silk Road summit, an initiative that reflects the global vocation of the People's Republic of China and may offer our companies attractive opportunities.

In 2018, Spain will continue to decisively promote this Asia agenda. We are going to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between Spain and Japan, the 45th anniversary of relations between Spain and China, and the 50th anniversary of relations with Singapore.

In this context, we are steadily intensifying our commitment to the Pacific. The entry into force of the European Union's Free Trade Agreements with Singapore and Vietnam, and those that the EU is negotiating with other countries from the region such as Australia and New Zealand, will undoubtedly contribute to the growing interest of Spanish companies in the ASEAN countries and to the progressive increase in the volume of our trade with these countries.

Ambassadors. We begin this new year with strength and hope.

In the coming year, at around this time, we will be beginning the commemoration of the Fifth Centenary of the first round-the-world voyage, undertaken by Magellan and Elcano. On circumnavigating the globe for the first time, Spain inaugurated a new era for humankind. An era in which the world became one; in which nothing was impossible. This is the spirit that brings us together and in which I encourage you to continue striving for the common good.

The Queen and I would like to once again offer our most heartfelt expression of Spain's friendship for your countries, and our best wishes of peace and prosperity for your citizens.

Thank you very much.