

Dinner to His Majesty's Judges
Mansion House
Wednesday 2nd July 2025
The Rt Hon The Lord Mayor of London
Alderman Alastair King DL

Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State, My Lady Chief Justice, President of the Supreme Court, My Lords, Master of The Rolls, Ministers, Fellow Aldermen, Mr Recorder, Sheriffs, Chief Commoner, Ladies and Gentlemen...

Good evening - and a very warm welcome here to Mansion House.

The eagle-eyed among you may have spotted that I am walking with a slight limp tonight - an injury sustained while taking part in the Lord Mayor's Cup on Friday...the inaugural charity football tournament to raise money for the Lord Mayor's Appeal. There is something mildly poetic about the Lord Mayor being injured playing in the Lord Mayor's Cup.

They say that there are two certainties in life: death and taxes, but let me add a third - middle-aged men overestimating their athletic abilities...

Talking of middle age, it is almost thirty years since I started my career as a solicitor with Baker Mackenzie.

Although I managed to tunnel out of the legal profession some time ago, I am particularly pleased to welcome here tonight our two guests of honour: the Lord Chancellor and the Lady Chief Justice.

I know I speak on behalf of everyone when I say that we very much look forward to hearing from you shortly.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Lady Davis and Ralph Davis - widow and son of the late Lord Justice William Davis. We join you in mourning a fearless judge, a fine public servant, but much more than that, a good man.

Throughout its history, the City of London Corporation has been deeply integrated with the judiciary.

Indeed, one of the many hats the Lord Mayor wears is that of Chief Magistrate of the City.

While it is a role that no longer holds any sentencing powers, I was delighted to attend recently a case at the Mayor's and City of London Court alongside the Lady Chief Justice, Judge Dight, and our two Sheriffs: Gregory Jones KC and David Chalk.

For 150 years, cases were also heard here, at Mansion House.

Lord Chancellor, I know that there are pressures across the prison estate - will there come a time when you propose to recommission the holding cells in the basement below?

130 years ago, London's business community were not a happy bunch.

Commercial disputes necessitated long, complicated, and expensive trials, with cases typically presided over by judges and juries unfamiliar with business practices.

Something had to change.

Petitions were lodged, solutions were posited, and here, in the Square Mile, the Commercial Court was established in 1895 - an effective and innovative way to resolve differences arising in business.

We are delighted that Mr Justice Henshaw of the Commercial Court joins us tonight.

Of course, the United Kingdom has always been a place of legal innovation.

Magna Carta - depicted in the magnificent stained-glass window to my left...habeas corpus...the Petition of Right...the Bill of Rights...the system of common law...

...evolutions developed and pioneered here, in Britain, which have not only offered a blueprint for fledgling democracies many times over, but to this day remain the litmus test for good governance around the world through the checks and balances they provide.

Those same checks and balances underpin everything we do in the City - boosting business confidence and attracting companies looking for a safe and fair place to ply their trade.

Packaged together under the banner of the 'rule of law', they form a remarkable British brand.

Indeed, according to the Law Society, English common law governs 40% of global corporate arbitrations...80% of global maritime deals...and a staggering 80% of global trade.

As I have been telling our partners during my visits abroad, if you want to insure against catastrophe, do it in London.

If you want to finance things on a green basis, do it in London.

If you want to raise debt or equity for your business, do it in London.

If you want to fall out with your partners, sue them in London!

No matter how well earned, like any brand, ours is not a static privilege or an immutable right.

It is a reputation that requires continual input and effort - something, here at the City of London Corporation, we understand well.

It is why we are investing £596 million in a new justice quarter - Salisbury Square

Our Policy Chairman, Chris Hayward, has helped drive this major project forward - a flagship facility for His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service that will provide magistrates', civil, and crown courts across 18 state-of-the-art courtrooms, along with a new headquarters for the City of London Police - the national force for fraud, economic, and cyber-crime.

City Bridge Foundation, our 900-year-old institution that is also London's biggest independent charity funder, has awarded grants totalling over £7.4 million to the London Legal Support Trust, and has made 'Access to Justice' one of four key visions identified as part of its ten-year funding policy - *Standing with Londoners*.

While having helped to establish the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts in 2017, the City Corporation is proud to have recently approved an uplift in its funding for this esteemed organisation - one which helps to ensure London remains *the* leading global centre for international commercial dispute resolution.

I thank Sir Robert Knowles and the Master of the Rolls, Sir Geoffrey Vos, for their respective work to further the Forum.

The rule of law is one of our great exports and the demand for expertise in English law continues to grow.

Look, as a case in point, at the Astana International Financial Centre and its sister court - a common law court system that operates to the highest international standards to resolve civil and commercial disputes throughout the Eurasia region.

Making use of an innovative e-Justice system that enables parties to file cases electronically from anywhere around the world, all eleven of its justices are either former British judges of distinction or experienced British barristers - including the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Burnett, who serves as its Chief Justice.

The benefits of the court are threefold.

First, and most immediately, it strengthens the rule of law across Kazakhstan and Central Asia - an intrinsic good.

Second, in doing so, it spurs economic development.

Indeed, as people have recognised for centuries - from the merchants of the Hanseatic League through to the father of English commercial law, Lord Mansfield - there is no greater contributor to trade and economic growth than the certainty of the law...or as the latter put it himself: business based not on "*subtleties and niceties*", but on "*rules easily learned and easily retained*."

Exporting our legal services - respected worldwide for their integrity as well as their expertise - is a remarkably effective fillip to developing markets.

Which is why - third in this self-fulfilling triumvirate: nurturing stronger, more stable economies rooted in the rule of law - be they in Asia, Africa, or South America - means an increased number of reliable trading partners for us, here in the United Kingdom.

The Astana International Financial Centre Court took a mere 18 months from conception to operation and we should strive to promote it as a template elsewhere around the world.

Indeed, at a time when foreign aid and development budgets feel the pinch, the law offers a bridge through initiatives like this.

A means to foster stronger, more resilient and less-corruption prone economies...boost international trade...raise per capita GDP...and advance the United Kingdom's soft power.

Reliability is, after all, a valuable currency in a world so full of uncertainty - a trait that is particularly valuable at this moment in time.

The United Kingdom is a safe, neutral place to do business...an honest broker in trade...a champion for open markets...and a bastion of the rule of law.

The judiciary is a key component in that equation, and one we are enormously grateful for...even if lawyers themselves do not always get due recognition for their achievements.

I have a personal example for you all.

Many of you will know Mr Recorder as a first-rate legal mind and a judge of the very highest order, but are you aware that he has also acted as cupid - the Cilla Black of the Old Bailey.

For it was at a Judges' Lunch hosted by Mr Recorder at the Old Bailey that the Lady Mayoress and I first met during my term as Sheriff...bringing new meaning to judicial activism and providing concrete proof that love really can blossom anywhere - even a judicial dining room.

If a then 54-year-old lifelong bachelor Sheriff can find love in a place that is so often associated with less joyful things, all sorts of good are possible in our British courts system.

Ladies and Gentlemen...I see my role as being cheerleader-in-chief for the United Kingdom's financial, professional, legal, and maritime services.

We are the world's leading legal services centre.

We need not be shy about this. No more English reserve or coyness.

At the time of the Brexit referendum, 525,000 people worked in financial and professional services here in the City. 678,000 do so now.

Combine that with those who work in the sector in Canary Wharf and Mayfair...883,000 people are employed in the financial and professional services in Greater London alone - more than the entire population of Frankfurt.

Similar comparisons can be drawn with other international financial and professional service hubs whom people assume are our rivals.

To those in the legal services, my message is a simple one: go out there and get on with it.

Jump on planes and bang on doors.

People want to buy what we have to sell - something I have heard around the world time and again on my travels this year.

Our partners trust us, they like what we do, they want to do business with us.

It is always easier to sell a fantastic product than it is an inferior one - but we cannot wait for people to come to us.

We have to go to them.

There is no excuse. Get out there, sell and shout about something that we do really well.

Thank you very much indeed.