

Gordon Brown's speech to Labour Conference

Gordon Brown has delivered his first speech to Conference as leader of the Labour Party.

24/09/2007

Honoured and humbled by the trust you have given me, I speak to you for the first time at our Conference as Prime Minister and Leader of this Party.

No one could have foreseen all the events that Britain has been through since June.

But tested again and again the resilience of the British people has been powerful proof of the character of our country.

Early on a June morning, two cars were found parked and packed with explosives in Haymarket, London.

They were put there to bring terror and death to men and women who would do nothing wrong but be out with their friends, walk on our streets and visit our capital.

But from the bomb disposal experts who courageously risked their lives, to the Londoners who defiantly went on with their lives, that day the world witnessed the resolve and strength of the British people.

And when the terrorists tried to attack Scotland's biggest airport, they were answered by the courage of the police and firefighters and a baggage handler named John Smeaton. He came to the aid of a policeman under assault from one of the terrorists.

Later John told me it was instinctive, he was doing what was right.

That man, that hero John Smeaton is here with us today and on behalf of our country – John, we thank you.

Every citizen who answered the call of the country – policemen and women, our security and emergency services, our health services – all left their mark on this island's story by keeping us safe. They are the pride of Britain.

Just as our armed services with bravery and heroism every single day also make us proud. We mourn those who have been lost and we honour all those who in distant places of danger give so much to our country.

It was in these early weeks, in the wake of the worst flooding in almost 150 years, in county after county, we saw British people pull on their boots and pull out their boats to rescue neighbours and strangers.

And together they went to work to clean up the streets, sweep out the shops and reopen the schools. Long after the waters have receded the memory of their quiet strength remains.

They too showed the character of Britain: communities where buildings can be damaged and even destroyed but our spirit is indestructible. They too make us proud of the extraordinary

resilience of ordinary British people.

And then on an early August morning in Surrey, a farmer went out to tend to his livestock and what he saw terrified him, made him remember back to 2001 when all across our countryside clouds of smoke scarred the sky and for many in farms and villages, family dreams were turned to ash.

During the outbreak this summer, our vets, scientists, and public officials in DEFRA cancelled their holidays. To fight the contagion farmers worked day and night. And they have done it all over again this month and continue to do so. Their actions live out our shared understanding that our countryside is more than the space that surrounds, it is the oxygen for our towns and cities.

And in order to be the country we should be, Britain must protect and cherish not just our cities, but our countryside too.

And as we saw again this summer there is no Scotland-only, no Wales-only, no England-only answer to the spread of disease or to terrorist attacks that can strike at any time, anywhere in any part of our country. And sharing this same small island, we will meet our environmental, economic and security challenges not by splitting apart but when we as Great Britain stand united together.

So my sense of talking to people in all parts of these islands is that instead of leaving us pessimistic, these three months make us more optimistic about what we the British people at our best can do.

Our response was calm and measured. We simply got on with the job.

Britain has been tested and not found wanting.

This is who we are.

And there is no weakness in Britain today that cannot be overcome by the strengths of the British people.

So don't let anyone tell us Britain is not equal to every challenge.

We all know that in our society we do have real problems to solve, real needs to meet, but don't let anyone tell us – the British people – that this country of ours, which has over centuries given so much to the world, has ever been broken by anyone or anything.

I am proud to be British.

I believe in British values.

My father and my mother taught me about family and the great virtues of hard work, doing your duty and always trying to do the right thing.

And I have never forgotten my father telling me to "treat everyone equally with respect".

His optimism led him to find goodness in everyone.

My father was a minister of the church, and his favourite story was the parable of the talents because he believed – and I do too – that each and everyone of us has a talent and each and everyone of us should be able to use that talent.

And the values I was brought up with are not just what I learned; they are part of the fabric of the life I have led.

Not just where I come from but the experiences that have shaped me.

I attended the local state primary school in Kirkcaldy a few streets away from where I lived - and then I took the school bus to the local secondary school up the hill.

And I have school friends I have kept in touch with all my life who have shared the good times and comforted me in the bad times.

Today I have the greatest privilege of all - to have been chosen by them to represent in Parliament the place where we all grew up together.

The office where I hold my constituency surgeries is just across the road – a few yards from the house where I lived as a child.

I benefited from great and dedicated teachers.

And I was fortunate enough to get to university.

But as a teenager I saw close friends of mine who might have gone to college or an apprenticeship or to university who never did.

I know some could not afford to stay on at school.

For others, their potential had never been nurtured.

When they heard about further education, they thought, or their parents thought, it was not for people like them.

And the reason I am here – the real reason I am here – is that I want their children and their grandchildren whom I also represent to have all the chances that were not available to my school friends when we were growing up.

That's the reason I am here: I want the best of chances for all families.

So what first made me want to do something in public service?

I don't recall all the sermons my father preached Sunday after Sunday.

But I will never forget these words he left me with: "we must be givers as well as getters".

Put something back.

And by doing so make a difference.

And this is my moral compass.

This is who I am.

I am a conviction politician.

I stand for a Britain where everyone should rise as far as their talents can take them and then the talents of each of us should contribute to the well being of all.

I stand for a Britain where all families who work hard can build a better life for themselves and their children.

I stand for a Britain where every young person who has it in them to study at college or university should not be prevented by money from doing so.

I stand for a Britain where public services exist for the patient, the pupil, the people who are to be served.

I stand for a Britain where it is a mark of citizenship that you should learn our language and traditions.

I stand for a Britain where we expect responsibility at every level of society.

I stand for a Britain that defends its citizens and both punishes crime and prevents it by dealing with the root causes.

I stand for a Britain where because this earth is on loan to us from future generations, we must all be stewards of the environment.

So I stand for a Britain where we all have obligations to each other and by fulfilling them, everyone has the chance to make the most of themselves.

And these are the principles which I believe can guide us as we, the British people, meet all the new challenges ahead: global economic competition, the terrorist and security threat, climate change, the yearning for stronger communities, the pressures to balance work and family life, and most of all - something you can hear and sense in every part of the country - the rising aspirations of the British people.

Our purpose has always been to be the party of progressive change.

Once our struggle was to secure minimum standards, then to extend opportunity.

But we need to be honest: today the rising aspirations of the British people summon us to set a new direction.

As the world changes so we must change too.

And I believe that when you get something right, you build on it. But part of experience and judgement is to recognise that when you fall short, you listen, you learn and then you are confident enough to change.

In Britain today too many still cannot rise as far as their talents can take them.

Yet this is the century where our country cannot afford to waste the talents of anyone.

Up against the competition of two billion people in China and India, we need to unlock all the talent we have.

In the last century the question was can we afford to do this?

In the face of economic challenge, I say: in this century we cannot afford not to.

And the country that brings out the best in all its people will be the great success story of the global age.

Now think of the communities from where we have travelled here to Bournemouth. How many young people - young boys in particular - fail to develop the potential they have?

How many women still come up against a glass ceiling that blocks their advance?

How many men and women who hope to move up the ladder in mid career are deprived of the chance to upgrade their skills and jobs?

How much talent that could flourish is lost through a poverty of aspiration: wasted not because young talents fail to reach the stars but because they grow up with no stars to reach for?

And how many of our youngest children are still deprived of the early learning they need.

Why should we accept so many children destined to fail even before their life's journey has begun?

So this is the next chapter in our progress. The next stage of our country's long journey to build the strong and fair society.

I want a Britain where there is no longer any ceiling on where your talents and hard work can take you.

Where what counts is not what where you come from and who you know, but what you aspire to and have it in yourself to become.

Past generations unlocked just some of the talents of some of the people.

In the new Britain of this generation, we must unlock all the talents of all of the people.

Not the old equality of outcome that discounts hard work and effort.

Not the old version of equality of opportunity – the rise of an exclusive meritocracy where only some can succeed and others are forever condemned to fail.

But a genuinely meritocratic Britain, a Britain of all the talents.

Where all are encouraged to aim high.

And all by their effort can rise.

A Britain of aspiration and also a Britain of mutual obligation where all play our part and recognise the duties we owe to each other.

New Labour: now the party of aspiration and community. Not just occupying but shaping and expanding the centre ground. A strong Britain; a fairer Britain.

Putting people and their potential first.

You know, there was another day in the past few months, one that did not make the news.

It was a day I went to Hackney to Lauriston Primary School where I met a six year old boy called Max.

We walked through the library and then the classrooms. He sat with his teacher, Eddie O'Brien, and me.

He had a book in his hand and his hair was a little uncombed - which as far as I am concerned may be a good sign.

Max had been falling behind at school, struggling to read. But because of the 'Every Child a Reader' programme, he was now receiving one to one coaching, and he wanted to read us a story.

He did brilliantly as he read from a gripping narrative about "The Gingerbread Man" and he smiled as he finished.

In that classroom our mission for change was as clear and strong as the words being read by Max.

What he was really telling us is that every child has potential if given the chance.

Today in education, private schools offer one to one tuition. But why shouldn't all pupils and not just some benefit from extra personal help?

And because I want every child to be a reader, every child to be able to count, we have decided that one-to-one tuition will be there in our schools not just for Max, but for 300,000 children in English and 300,000 in maths.

And because we want to unlock all the potential, not just the three R's, for every pupil as we look ahead with pride to the Olympics we aim for the first time for five hours a week sport and time for arts and music too.

So whenever we see talent under-developed; aspirations unfulfilled; potential wasted; obstacles to be removed; this is where we – new Labour - will be.

Hear me when I say: No matter where you come from. No matter your background. No

matter what school you go to. My message, our message, is and must be: if you try hard, we will help you make the most of your talents.

So for every secondary pupil a personal tutor throughout their school years - and starting with 600,000 pupils, small group tuition too.

Learning personal to each pupil.

Education available to all – not one size fits all but responding to individual needs.

This is the future for our public services. Accessible to all, personal to you. Not just a basic standard but the best quality tailored to your needs. Education is my passion.

And as we expand specialist, trust and academy schools it's also time to make the biggest change in education in decades, a ten year children's plan to make our schools, colleges and universities world class.

Instead of education from 5 to 16, we will be offering free universal education to every child – from nursery school at 3 to advanced studies or training right up to 18.

In just one decade we are doing what no government has ever done: moving the right to education from 11 years free education to 15 years.

But we will only make the most of this if every teenager who leaves at 18 can graduate with a good qualification.

So for every apprentice, a certificate of completion. For every college or school student, A-levels and diplomas and for all a clear pathway into skilled work. And we offer teenagers national youth community service - I want every young person in Britain to be able to say: this is my country. I contribute to it. I help make it better.

It's wrong that anybody should be put off going to college or university by the fear it will cost too much.

So when the big new changes we are now making are fully in place, 300,000 students will receive full grants. 600,000 – that's two thirds of students - will have grants. That's the change: more students with grants than at any time in the history of university education.

And to those who say more going to university must mean worse standards, let us stand up for opportunity. In many other countries the majority of young people now go to university. In Britain just 42 per cent; just 10 per cent from low income backgrounds. So for 16 year olds from low income families who stay on at school, we will make a new five year offer - we will finance you through college or university, right through to 21.

Merit rewarded in a Britain not divided by class but united by aspiration. Showing a class-free society is not a slogan but in Britain can become a reality.

Every fifty seconds in Britain a child is born.

Who knows what might happen to that child? Who knows if they could someday start a thriving business, become a proud nurse, a good football player, or a great scientist? Who

knows if they will exceed all of their parents' hopes to see them get on, have a good job and a loving family?

So every child deserves the best possible start in life.

We have lifted 600,000 children out of poverty. We are doubling child benefits. We have trebled maternity allowances. And 6 million families now benefit from the Child Tax Credit.

None of this happened before a Labour Government.

But we are not satisfied.

And the Pre Budget Report will set out our next steps because our goal for this generation is to abolish child poverty and let me reaffirm that goal today.

And I say to the children of two parent families, one parent families, foster parent families; to the widow bringing up children: I stand for a Britain that supports as first class citizens not just some children and some families but supports all children and all families.

We all remember that biblical saying: "suffer the little children to come unto me." No Bible I have ever read says: "bring just some of the children."

Because no child should ever be written off, for mothers of infants, we will expand the help of nurse-family partnerships.

And for families and teenagers in trouble, new one-to-one support led by the voluntary sector that, up and down the country, we know can make all the difference.

And because its unfair to the children that fathers walk away from their responsibilities, we will insist on new powers to name absent fathers on birth certificates and to pay their share: maintenance deducted from benefits as we return them to work.

And let me also say that I am now understanding the daily pressures all families and all parents are under to do everything on time: make breakfast, get the kids to school with their homework done, make sure no one forgets their P.E. kit or a school play rehearsal. And of course fit in your own life and work and make sure it all fits in 24 hours.

I have heard the call for change and we must respond to the rising aspirations of parents.

Because we, a Labour government, introduced six months paid maternity leave, the take up has risen from 25 per cent to 90 per cent. And so it is right this year to raise it to nine months for all mothers on the road to 12 months paid maternity leave.

All this is part of the revolution in services for parents and the under fives: now 7,000 extended schools, moving from zero to 3,500 sure start children's centres, the doubling of nursery education – two-thirds of a million more child care places.

This is the next stage in the transformation of public services. Our aim high quality care not just available to some but to all and tailored to parents needs when they need it and at a price they can afford.

A growing number of parents who care for their children now also care for elderly relatives. I want our new carers commission to hear the call for change from millions of carers – and this government will now do more for respite care, for training of carers, for better pension rights and to give new priority to caring for disabled children.

And I pay tribute to our Deputy Leader Harriet Harman who by her campaigning work is pioneering this cause of equality. No discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, age, or faith. And no discrimination against the disabled.

We know that all parents are under more than the pressure of time.

Today amongst the biggest influences on children are the Internet, TV, commercial advertising. And like many parents I feel I'm struggling to set the boundaries so that children can be safe – and that's why we have asked Dr Tanya Byron to look at how families can make the most of the opportunities new technology gives while doing our duty to protect children from harmful material.

And to honour those who raised us, I can affirm our commitment to restore the link between the Basic State Pension and earnings.

It's time also to make public services personal to the needs of the elderly: more control over personal social care budgets; more choice managing chronic care; a wider range of services from home helps to district nurses. Better personal care so that older people can choose to stay in their own homes.

I want to ensure for all those who have served the community all their lives – respect, dignity and security in old age.

And everything we build -- we build on a strong foundation of economic stability.

Our commitment to stability has been tested again and again over ten years: the Asian crisis; the Russian crisis; the American recession; the trebling of oil prices. And in the last month a wave of financial turbulence that started in America and then Germany and has impacted on all countries including the United Kingdom and tested the stability of our financial system.

Yesterday Alistair Darling set out how we will continue to respond with the same calm vigilance that he has demonstrated over recent weeks.

And it is because of the strength of the British economy that we are able to steer a path of low inflation, low interest rates and stable growth.

Ten years ago before a Labour government we were 7th in the G7 for income per head. Now we are second only to the USA - above Germany, above France, above Italy, above Japan, above Canada - with the longest uninterrupted period of economic growth in the history of our country.

And in Britain where once there were three million unemployed, there are today more men and women in jobs than ever in our history - for the first time over 29 million people in work.

And we will continue to intensify the reform of the new deal, remove every barrier, show we

can have flexibility and fairness together to advance to a Britain of full employment in our generation.

And we will build on one of the greatest achievements of our Labour and trade union movement – the National Minimum Wage. Next week we will again raise the National Minimum Wage to £5.52 an hour and because we will do more for vulnerable workers, in all companies and in all places the minimum wage will be enforced without exception.

And next week for the first time on top of holiday entitlement 4 days paid public holidays guaranteed.

We should take pride that, under a Labour government, Britain - this small number of people on this small island - is the fifth largest economy in the world.

As we set out on the next stage of our journey this is our vision: Britain leading the global economy – by our skills and creativity, by our enterprise and flexibility, by our investment in transport and infrastructure – a world leader in science; a world leader in financial and business services; a world leader in energy and the environment from nuclear to renewables; a world leader in the creative industries; and yes – modern manufacturing too – drawing on the talents of all to create British jobs for British workers.

There is another aspiration I have heard across the country.

I've met too many young couples who've told me - we work hard, we save, we play by the rules, we want to get on and yet we can't afford to buy or even rent our first home.

So we plan to help first time buyers and we will increase house-building to 240,000 new homes a year - in places and ways that respect our green spaces and the environment. My aim by 2010 two million more homeowners than in 1997.

And for the first time in nearly half a century we will show the imagination to build new towns - eco-towns with low and zero carbon homes. And today because of the response we have received we are announcing that instead of just 5 new eco towns, we will now aim for ten eco towns ---- building thousands of new homes in every region of the country.

And for affordable housing and for social housing we will now invest £8 billion. This will mean a 50 per cent increase in funds for social housing. I call on all housing associations and councils of all political parties not only to support shared equity for first time buyers, but to help us build more social homes for rent, more homes for key workers and more homes to cut the unacceptable levels of overcrowding. Good homes to rent and buy for the British people.

A strong Britain is a Britain of strong communities where by accepting our mutual obligations to each other we can make our homes, our streets and our neighbourhoods safe.

Those who choose to disobey the laws of our land - their crimes, the pain they inflict, that danger and immorality - threaten the rights and security of every citizen.

No parent should ever have to endure the suffering of the family of Rhys Jones, the young boy callously murdered in Liverpool on Wednesday August 22nd.

And the reason the people of Britain have been so shocked is that amongst the vast majority of us there is an abhorrence of guns in our society.

That is why we took the right decision to ban handguns. And now we need to deal with the illegal supply of guns.

Two thirds of deaths from gun crime occur in just four cities. In the last few weeks Jacqui Smith and I have focussed on the specific areas in these cities where as I saw on Saturday at first hand the police will now: match intensive uniformed patrolling and extensive undercover work; with the use of stop and search powers and dispersal powers; reinforced by new hand-held weapon detectors; and all backed up at a national level by the work of the organised crime agency and our border force rigorously targeting and stopping the illegal entry of guns.

My answer to crime and disorder - our policy - is to both punish and prevent.

To punish: for anyone over 18 illegally carrying a gun, a five-year sentence.

To prevent: in our schools intensive education warning about guns and knives and teachers encouraged to use new powers to confiscate weapons. And in our communities ex gang members helping us pull young people out of gangs.

To punish the evil of drug pushers who poison our children: I want the tough new powers that have already closed over one thousand crack houses in some areas of the country to be used in all areas of the country.

And to encourage local police to use new powers to confiscate drug profits, more of the confiscated funds will go direct to the police and local communities.

To prevent addiction: we will extend drug education and expand drug treatment and we will send out a clear message that drugs are never going to be decriminalised.

There are now 139,000 police officers and 16,000 Community Support Officers – more officers than ever before.

And by April 7th next year, every community will have its own neighbourhood policing team. And I can announce that we will provide hand held computers - 1,000 now, by next year 10,000 right across the country – cutting paper work so that officers can log crimes on the spot, stay on the beat and not waste time returning to the station to fill out forms.

So yes we will strengthen the police. Yes we will strengthen our laws. But preventing crime for me also means all of us as a community setting boundaries between what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – with clear penalties for stepping over the line.

Boundaries that reflect the words I was taught when I was young – words upon which we all know strong communities are founded: discipline, respect, responsibility.

Bullying is unacceptable – and unacceptable too is disrupting a classroom.

So to punish: we will give teachers the support they need to exclude.

To prevent: parents held accountable – fined if they fail to supervise. And so that these

young people are not left to hang around street corners, councils and authorities obligated to maintain their education and supervision.

Binge drinking and underage drinking that disrupt neighbourhoods are unacceptable.

To punish: let me tell the shops that repeatedly sell alcohol to those who are under age – we will take your licences away.

To prevent: councils should use new powers to ban alcohol in trouble spots and I call on the industry to do more to advertise the dangers of teenage drinking.

I've met young people and pensioners alike who say they want to feel safe when they go out but also that young people need somewhere to go and something to do.

So respect must be a two way street.

As we take action against anti-social behaviour, so too we must take action that could transform our communities, by providing the kind of facilities young people want and need.

So we will use unclaimed assets in dormant bank accounts to build new youth centres, and we will invest over £670 million pounds so that in every community there are places for young people to go. With youth budgets let us say to young people: for the first time you will have a say over how the money is spent.

I believe we have not done enough in the last ten years to emphasise that in return for the rights we all have, there are responsibilities we all owe.

New rights to better health care but you have to show up and not miss your appointment. New rights to educational maintenance allowances but you have to show you are working hard. New rights to higher maternity allowances but you have to meet with a health visitor. The right for company boards to make their own decisions, but obligations to the rest of society too. And an understanding that if you come to our country you not only learn our language and culture: you must play by the rules.

In July I announced a new unified border force. And already the first elements are in place - a stronger uniformed presence at ports, customs officers targeting illegal immigration, stronger security checks at passport control, by next year ID cards for foreign nationals and we will start to count people in and out.

And we will move forward with our new Australian-style points-based approach to immigration. So Britain will continue to benefit from skilled workers from abroad and they will understand their responsibilities to earn the right to settle in Britain.

But let me be clear any newcomer to Britain who is caught selling drugs or using guns will be thrown out. No-one who sells drugs to our children or uses guns has the right to stay in our country.

And to achieve a Britain of mutual obligation, I am convinced that we need a new kind of politics.

I continue to reach out to all those who work hard and play by the rules, who believe in

strong families and a patriotic Britain who may have supported other parties but who like me want to defend and advance British values and our way of life.

All of the challenges we have to face can only be met by listening to and involving the British people themselves. And I have no doubt that the best answer to disengagement from our democracy is to renew our democracy.

And that means more change:

Change to make the executive more accountable. That's why parliament will make the final decisions about peace and war;

Change to strengthen our liberties to uphold the freedom of speech, freedom of information and the freedom to protest;

Change to strengthen local democracy with new powers for economic development and bus services and I pay tribute to the work of our local Labour councillors across the country.

Change within our own party, now for the first time to decide our policy one member one vote;

And yes: change to the House of Lords - and we will in our manifesto commit to introduce the principle of elections for the second chamber.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for the new politics is to show how we as a community can join together to safeguard the environment, to turn the silent, rising tide of global warming.

And I am proud that Britain will now become the first country in the world to write into law binding limits on carbon emissions. But I am not satisfied: so I am asking the new independent climate change committee to report on whether the 60 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050, which is already bigger than most other countries, should be even stronger still.

And by investing in energy efficiency, renewables, carbon capture, clean fuels and new environmental technologies, I want Britain to lead in carbon-free vehicles, carbon-free homes and carbon-free industry. And I want the new green technologies of the future to be the source of British jobs in British businesses.

And I commit to work tirelessly for a new post-Kyoto UN climate change agreement with - yes - to help the poorest, binding targets for all the richest countries.

And let me say: we in Britain cannot be good stewards of the environment unless we are good internationalists and that means being good Europeans too.

At all times we will stand up for the British national interest.

And I accept my responsibility to write in detail into the amended European Treaty the red lines we have negotiated for Britain.

And whether it's environmental, economic or security cooperation, we will hold fast to the partnerships with our closest ally America, our membership of the European Union, the

Commonwealth and our commitment to the United Nations.

You know, there is a golden thread of common humanity that across nations and faiths binds us together and it can light the darkest corners of the world. And the message should go out to anyone facing persecution anywhere from Burma to Zimbabwe: human rights are universal and no injustice can last forever.

People will look back on events in Darfur as they did in Rwanda and say why did you the most powerful countries in the world fail to act, to come to the aid of those with the least power?

Who can fail to be moved by the mother in Darfur who saved her two youngest children from militias and hid them away? She rushed back to her village to find her husband and older son murdered - and then was repeatedly raped by the Janjawid.

All for being a member of the wrong tribe, all for acting upon that shared human impulse to protect her own children.

Her story touches our deepest conscience and summons us to act. In my first weeks I went to the United Nations where we fought for and secured a clear and unequivocal UN-resolution. We have sent a message directly to the government of Sudan: make progress or face tougher new sanctions. And we will not rest until there is an end to the aerial bombings, a ceasefire, a lasting political settlement and justice for the women and children of Darfur.

One of the great challenges we now face is to work for peace and security in the Middle East. Tony Blair - for thirteen years the Leader of our Party - is now leading in the middle east peace effort and let me here acknowledge the contribution he is making now and the debt we owe as a party and as a country to Tony Blair.

And as the Northern Ireland Assembly meets, thanks also to the work of Tony Blair, let us celebrate that Northern Ireland is now building prosperity because it is now enjoying peace.

And working internationally for understanding and reconciliation across borders, Neil Kinnock, here with us today, is chairing the British Council and let me also acknowledge the debt of gratitude we in this party owe to him.

Because we will do our duty and discharge our obligations, we will work in Iraq and Afghanistan for three objectives: security, political reconciliation and economic reconstruction, and at all times we will do everything to ensure the security of our dedicated armed forces.

Let me say: there should be no safe haven, no hiding place anywhere in the world for Al Qaida and terrorism.

To prevail in this struggle will require more than military force and we will work with our allies to isolate extremism and win the battle of hearts and minds.

I tell you today: there is a global poverty emergency.

Today 80 million children do not go to school. I want us, inspired by Nelson Mandela's lead to take a campaign to every corner of the world - so that we will be the first generation to

ensure every child in every country in every continent has the right to go to school.

Every year 10 million die from diseases we could have the medicine and science to prevent and cure. If in the 20th century human ingenuity could put a man on the face of the moon, then surely in this 21st century human compassion can lift the pain from the face of a suffering child. So let us be the first generation to ensure that every infant child and mother is protected against, and that we eliminate, the scourges of tuberculosis, polio, diphtheria, malaria - and HIV/aids.

For sixty years Britain has shown the way to health care not as a privilege to be paid for but as a fundamental human right.

Better than any other endeavour the NHS expresses our mutual obligation to each other: because all of us need help some of the time, it is the best insurance policy in the world.

I've been round the country and I've been visiting hospitals, GP surgeries, health centres.

I have listened to and I have heard the British people.

They know when they have a medical emergency the NHS is there for them and at its best. They tell me of their huge admiration for our doctors, our nurses and our NHS staff - and we do not thank them enough, and we should do so now.

I know too there are real concerns about basic things that need to change: getting in to see your GP when you need to; being confident the ward in your hospital will be clean; and at every stage being treated as an individual with respect.

So yes there is work to do.

But let us be clear: the British people do not want to remove the NHS bit by bit; they want to improve the NHS year by year.

And why shouldn't all British people and not just some be able to see their Doctor at the time they want, at the hospital or clinic they want - not at a time someone else wants.

So let me set out how we take the NHS into a new era.

Our great achievement of the 1940s was a service universal to all. In 2007 we need a service that is accessible to all and personal to all.

Our great ambition now: a National Health Service that is also a personal health service.

And we now have to make big practical changes to set a new standard of service.

MRSA and C-Difficile are this century's hospital diseases which every modern country is now having to root out.

And to make sure every hospital is clean and safe, following best practice around the world, there will be new funds direct to every hospital for a deep clean of our wards.

We will more than double the number of hospital matrons to 5,000. We will give matrons and

ward sisters in all 10,000 wards the powers to report cleaning contractors and safety concerns directly to hospital boards and a stronger health care commission.

And I can announce that matrons will have the power to order additional cleaning and send out a message - meet the highest standards of cleanliness or lose your contract.

I want an NHS: personal to you because you are seen by a consultant in a matter of days, not months; personal to you because there is a right to be given x-ray results quickly and time to discuss your treatment; personal to you because we know that being unwell is not just a nine to five problem.

And so we will make GP hours more friendly to families, open up opportunities to see a GP near your place of work as well as your home, expand walk in centres, medical services at pharmacies and ensure a better service from NHS Direct.

I know the most worrying time for women is whenever breast cancer is suspected. That's when you need an NHS personal to you.

On best medical advice, we will now extend the ages for breast cancer screening by six years, treat every suspected breast cancer as urgent and guarantee your consultant can fast track you.

And we will also extend colon cancer screening right up the age scale into your seventies.

I can also say that, following the review by Professor Darzi, my aim for the next stage of an NHS personal to you: for every adult a regular check up on the NHS.

In July I met Liam Fairhurst, a twelve year old boy who won the Diana Princess of Wales medal for raising money for cancer and leukaemia research. And he was raising money in memory of a childhood friend who died from cancer even as he himself is fighting the disease.

And I believe this too is a mission for our generation.

Over the next ten years: I am proud to announce that through the medical research council and the NHS together, Britain will invest more than ever before - £15 billion of public money - financing the genius of British researchers and doctors as they convert breakthroughs in genetics, stem cell research and new drugs into cures and vaccines to combat cancer and the deadliest of diseases.

My vision of the NHS – an NHS that is both pioneering new cures and personal to you.

And why do I believe so strongly in the NHS?

When I was at school it was football, rugby, running, sports: these were what I did all the time and so I was fitter then.

But when I was sixteen, when I was playing for my school rugby team against our former pupils, someone accidentally kicked me near my eyes. And from the age of 16 to 21, I spent a lot of time in hospital as the NHS worked to save my sight.

I learned that with a simple twist of fate life can change.

It was the skills of a surgeon, the care of wonderful nurses, the attention and yes, the love and care of the NHS staff that managed to save one of my eyes.

And it is because of the NHS that I can see the words I read today.

The experiences we live through shape the way we think of the world. Experiences like these have made me the person I am.

Sometimes people say I am too serious and I fight too hard and maybe that's true.

But these experiences taught me what families all across Britain know: that things don't always come easy and there are things worth fighting for.

Like so many people across this country I have the best of reasons to believe in the life-saving power of the NHS - and the liberating power of education - and for making them both the best they can be.

So this is my pledge to the British people:

I will not let you down.

I will stand up for our schools and our hospitals.

I will stand up for British values.

I will stand up for a strong Britain.

And I will always stand up for you.