

Visit of His Royal Highness The Grand Duke
in Washington from September 12 to 14, 2004
Reopening of the Luxembourg Embassy in Washington

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests,

Three days ago, on September 10, Luxembourg celebrated the 60th anniversary of its liberation from Nazi oppression and recalled once again the American soldiers who came to our rescue, as they had done once before during the First World War. We are still indebted and deeply grateful to the brave American soldiers who fought for our freedom and to secure peace on our continent. We shall never forget the sacrifice of so many young lives.

It is with good reason that we are paying this year a particular tribute to all of these heroes. December 16th, 2004, will mark the 60th anniversary of the start of the Battle of the Bulge. I was pleased to learn that an important delegation from the US Congress will participate in the commemorations later this year, both in Belgium and in Luxembourg.

As friends and allies, the United States of America and Luxembourg have always enjoyed close and warm relations, as nations and as people who stood shoulder to shoulder in both good and hard times.

In the 19th century, when Luxembourg was still a poor rural country, a third of our population migrated to this country, looking for prosperity in the New World. Many settled down in the American mid-west, including the ancestors of the Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert whom we shall be honoring tomorrow in this same place.

The Embassy of Luxembourg, the building in which we are standing today, has a special significance for my family, in the context of the historic events of the Second World War.

After the Nazi troops invaded Luxembourg, my grandmother Grand Duchess Charlotte left the country. She came first to the United States. Under the guidance of President Roosevelt, and thanks to his sincere friendship, her family settled in Canada, before joining the Luxembourg Government in exile in London. In 1941, she bought this building. During her time in North America, Grand Duchess Charlotte frequently visited Washington and stayed in this house awaiting the call to return to her beloved country.

Finally the Luxembourg Government acquired the building in 1962. Since that time it has served as the Embassy of Luxembourg in Washington, first as the residence, then as the Chancery.

For more than forty years, this building has been associated with major events: it was the site of meetings and social events during the State visits paid to the United States by Grand Duchess Charlotte in 1963, at the invitation of President John F. Kennedy, and my father Grand Duke Jean in 1984, at the invitation of President Ronald Reagan.

After almost a hundred years of existence, however, the building was showing its age and was in need of a serious facelift. For almost two years, it has been undergoing extensive renovations and it is now ready to host many other major events in the framework of the bilateral and the transatlantic relationships, particularly as we prepare for our next Presidency of the European Union.

For all these reasons, I am delighted to be here to celebrate the reopening of this historic building in the presence of so many distinguished guests, among them our Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as our Minister of Economic Affairs and Foreign Trade.

My stay in Washington will also allow me to participate in an academic event and the launch of a trade mission. But as you can see, this visit is set first in the context of gratitude and remembrance for the sacrifices that were made in the name of liberty. Keeping up the memory of the past will remind us that the values of freedom and democracy will always be worth fighting for.

We are fully aware that the country that helped liberate Europe has not been spared by tragedy. Just three years have passed since the events of September 11, when America was struck at its heart. 9/11 was the time for America's European allies to show in return their solidarity in the fight against terrorism.

That is the spirit in which I now unveil this plaque, which will serve as a reminder of the everlasting friendship between the United States and Luxembourg and a token of our gratitude to this great Nation.