

Speech by King Felipe VI of Spain on the occasion of Christmas

Calls for moderation and coexistence

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USPA NEWS - Good evening and thank you for allowing me to accompany you for a few moments on such a special night of encounter and celebration, which I wish you, along with the Queen, Princess Leonor and Infanta Sofia, to be happy and peaceful. This Christmas Eve I would like to refer first, and I am sure you will understand me, to the terrible Dana that almost two months ago struck with unusual force several areas of eastern and southern Spain, especially in Valencia.

The people who lost their lives and those who disappeared deserve all our respect and we must never forget the pain and sadness they have left in their families. Thousands of people saw how what until recently was their town, their neighbourhood, their work, their home, their business, their school, was reduced to rubble or even disappeared. A difficult fact to accept, but from which we should all be able to draw the necessary lessons that strengthen us as a society and make us grow.

We must never forget those first images of the flood that swept everything away, the rescues of people, some sick, elderly or exhausted, who tried to get out of their cars or took refuge on roofs and terraces. We also saw those who opened their homes to welcome the most vulnerable, opposing the relentless force of water and mud with the overwhelming force of solidarity and humanity. Neighbours, volunteers, civil protection teams, firefighters, security forces, Armed Forces, NGOs, and also companies that organized collections and donations, even mobilizing their staff and machinery... the help and collaboration of everyone is helping, little by little, the more than 800,000 people affected to gradually recover a certain degree of normality in their lives. And that the medium and long term be equally addressed to really ensure recovery.

We have recognized this solidarity in its purest and most concrete sense day after day in the enormous work of anonymous volunteers and public servants; and we have also seen - and understood - the frustration, the pain, the impatience, the demands for greater and more effective coordination of administrations. Because all these emotions - those that move and comfort and those that hurt and sadden - arise from the same root: the awareness of the common good, the expression of the common good, or the demand for the common good.

Above the eventual divergences and disagreements, a clear idea prevails in Spanish society of what is convenient, of what benefits everyone and that, for that reason, we have the interest and responsibility to protect and reinforce it. It is something that the Queen and I have been able to see and value even more throughout this decade of reign. It is the responsibility of all institutions, of all Public Administrations, to ensure that this notion of the common good continues to be clearly reflected in any discourse or any political decision. Consensus on what is essential, not only as a result, but also as a constant practice, must always guide the public sphere. Not to avoid the diversity of opinions, which is legitimate and necessary in democracy, but to prevent this diversity from leading to the denial of the existence of a shared space.

It is from this agreement on what is essential that we must address the issues that concern us and that affect us in ways that are different from our collective life. The growing international instability, the climate in which our public debate often takes place, the difficulties in accessing housing or the management of immigration are issues, among others, that deserve our attention and that I also want to address tonight.

Immigration is a complex phenomenon of great social sensitivity that responds to diverse causes. Without population movements throughout history, the societies of today could not be explained; they are open and interconnected societies. Migration, therefore, is an everyday reality and can lead - without proper management - to tensions that erode social cohesion.

The effort to integrate, which is everyone's responsibility, respect - also by everyone - for the laws and basic rules of coexistence and civility, and recognition of the dignity that every human being deserves, are the pillars that must guide us when dealing with immigration. Without ever forgetting the firmness required in the fight against the networks and mafias that traffic in people. The way in which we are able to deal with immigration - which also requires good coordination with our European partners, as well as with the countries of origin and transit - will say a lot in the future about our principles and the quality of our democracy.

Another issue, which is of particular concern to young people, is the difficulty in accessing housing. Cities, especially large cities, act as growth hubs and generate a demand that supply cannot meet. It is important, once again, that all the actors involved reflect, listen to each other, examine the different options and that this dialogue leads to solutions that facilitate access to housing in acceptable conditions, especially for the youngest and most unprotected, since this is the basis for security, the well-being of so many life projects. And we can really do it.

Our lives are also affected by an increasingly complex and changing – and even turbulent – external scenario. We see how international law is too often questioned, violence is resorted to, the universality of human rights is denied or multilateralism is called into question to face the global challenges of our time, such as climate and environmental crises, pandemics, energy transition or trade and the scarcity of natural resources. We also see how the validity of democracy as a system of government is even being discussed.

In this context, Spain and the other member states of the European Union must continue to defend with conviction and firmness, together with our international partners, the foundations of liberal democracy, the defense of human rights and the achievements in social welfare on which our great political project is based. Because Europe – the idea of Europe – is an essential part of our shared identity, of the legacy that we owe to future generations. In a world in need of strong and cohesive actors, but above all of behavior inspired by principles and values, Europe remains our most valuable reference.

And if we look inwards, our great reference in Spain is the Constitution of 1978, its letter and its spirit. Agreement on the essentials was the fundamental principle that inspired it. Working for the common good is precisely preserving the great pact of coexistence where our democracy is affirmed and our rights and freedoms are enshrined, pillars of our Social and Democratic State of Law. Despite the time that has passed, the harmony that was the fruit of this agreement remains our great foundation. Cultivating this spirit of consensus is necessary to strengthen our institutions and to maintain the trust of the whole society in them.

A pact of coexistence is protected by dialogue; this dialogue, with dignity and generosity, must always nourish the definition of the common will and the action of the State. That is why it is necessary that the political conflict, legitimate but sometimes thunderous, does not prevent us from hearing an even more clamorous demand: a demand for serenity. Serenity in the public sphere and in daily life, to face collective or individual and family projects, to prosper, to care for and protect those who need it most. The recent reform of article 49 of the Constitution, referring to people with disabilities, is a good example of what we can achieve together. And we cannot allow discord to become a constant background noise that prevents us from hearing the authentic pulse of the citizenry.

You have heard me say it many times and I would like to repeat it: Spain is a great country. A nation with a prodigious history, despite its dark chapters, and a model in the democratic development of the last decades, even defeating the terrorist harassment that caused so many victims. A country with a present that, despite the much we still have to do, for example, in terms of poverty and social exclusion, is promising when observing the performance of our economy – in terms of, among others, growth, employment or exports – and the general level of our social well-being. And looking to the future, I sincerely believe that we Spaniards have enormous potential that should give us hope, both at the national level and on the international scene.

That future lies mainly in our youth, the same one that has made our name shine in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and in the last European Championship, the one that undertakes despite the difficulties and the one that is at the forefront of our science; the youth who respect our elders and their valuable experience, the one who most insists on progress in terms of equality, the one who prepares in our schools, institutes, universities, vocational training centers, to access the job market with energy despite the youth unemployment figures; the youth, in short, who seek opportunities and overcome obstacles based on merit and effort. But above all, the one who has filled us with pride by turning out in droves to give their best in the streets of the towns affected by the DANA.

With this spirit of work and commitment to what belongs to everyone, to the common good, I end my words and return to the beginning. I return to all the municipalities and regions affected by the floods, in many of which there is still so much to do, where the need of the residents is so great that it makes all efforts seem small, even without losing hope.

May the solidarity that has united us in the most difficult moments continue to be present in every gesture, in every action, in every decision. May aid reach all those who need it, so that they can rebuild the future for which they have fought so hard, facing with courage and dignity the challenges of a sometimes implacable present. The sooner we achieve this, the more we will strengthen our sense of community, our feeling of country. Because the memory of the path taken, confidence in the present and hope for the future are an unavoidable part, perhaps the most valuable, but also the most delicate, of our common good.

May the spirit of these days of meeting and coexistence continue into the new year and may you have – I wish you, along with the

Queen and our daughters, Princess Leonor and Infanta Sofía – a very Merry Christmas.

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