

Commemoration of the passing of the Australian diplomat John Paul Quinn in the AF Caravelle plane crash (12 September 1961)

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Exactly 60 years ago on 12 September 1961, 77 people died in an accident on a commercial flight from Paris to Rabat. Grieving alongside Morocco and France, the United States, Italy, Kuwait, Luxemburg, Russia and Switzerland, Australia lost one of the pioneers of its diplomacy, Mister John Paul Quinn, then Australian Ambassador to Cairo.

On this day of commemoration, our thoughts are obviously with the victims of this accident and their loved ones and descendants for whom their memory is still alive. Amongst the deceased struck by this misfortune were families, children, people from many walks of life. The fact of gathering here today is a way of honouring their shared memory and paying a dignified tribute to each of these lives the course of which was cut too short.

At the time, this dramatic episode revealed the strength of the ties that existed within the international community. On the ground, His Majesty the King of Morocco authorised the organisation of the first rescue efforts and Morocco immediately provided valuable emergency help. Condolences and press clippings crossed the borders of the countries involved, as well as cooperation and constant communication that was on display right up to the enquiries that followed.

Commemorating today this tragic event allows us to remember this common ground of equality and dialogue on which our diplomatic relations are founded. Tested by the disaster, deep hopes rise to the surface, and, in these circumstances, even more than elsewhere, nationality is overtaken by humanity. The primary attention given to citizens, the sharing of efforts to resolve the crisis situation, the sincere and free assistance between countries were what characterised the reaction by States, the diplomatic corps and the population on the ground after the accident. This basis for coming together is precious and deserves to be highlighted because that is, what after all, allows us, as diplomats to find shared instruments for action and to strengthen our impact on the world today. Cooperation and mutual assistance are the essential elements for peacemakers and to guarantee the greater good.

This ceremony honours the work of Mister John Paul Quinn, pioneer of Australian diplomacy who met his tragic death in the accident. He distinguished himself notably in the development of the first relations between Australia and Morocco. After a brilliant career, a part of which took place in Paris in the hallways of the Sorbonne, he went back to the Department of Foreign Affairs in 1940 and then occupied many important positions with a true professionalism. The testimonies that have been made to us today, such as that with which his son, Mr John Quinn has honoured us, describe his intelligence and clear-sightedness as much as his human qualities, a humility and an altruism without pretence: a suitable mix of conviction, seriousness and sincerity.

In 2017, another pioneer of Australian Moroccan relations, Mrs Berenice Owen-Jones, opened the first Australian embassy in Morocco in order to try to reduce, in her own words, "the tyranny of distance." At the time of the accident of the Air France Caravelle, Mr John Paul Quinn was undertaking, to the same end, one of the first official visits to Rabat to initiate diplomatic relations between Australia and Morocco. This example shows us that distance is never a brake on the understanding and friendship between two countries for those who know how to work actively at it.

In this way, an act of remembrance 60 years and one embassy later is to recall that our diplomatic relations are built over time and by many, with the strength of projects, ideas and everyone's

commitment, and are nourished by solidarity, this solidarity on which once again, in the context of the current sanitary crisis, we must not forget to act.