

Remarks

Commemoration service John Paul Quinn OBE

Australian embassy, Rabat, 13 September 2021

Michael Cutts, Australian Ambassador to Morocco

Welcome to John Quinn, his son, his two daughters Joanna Quinn and Alison Quinn, other members of their family and former colleagues and friends of John Paul Quinn and distinguished guests joining us remotely from Australia.

His Eminence Cardinal, Archbishop of Rabat

His Excellency the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt

Their Excellencies the Ambassadors from Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands

The Deuxieme Conseiller from the French embassy

The Secretary General of the Rabita Mohammadia des Oulemas

Representatives from the Moroccan Foreign Affairs Department

Charges from the US and Italian embassies and diplomatic colleagues from the Canadian and Russian embassies

The Director General North Africa and the Sahel representing Air France

Ladies and gentlemen

Thanks to you all for being with us today.

We gather here today on the grounds of the Australian embassy in Rabat, Morocco, to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the passing of John Paul Quinn OBE while on active service for his country in the employment of the then External Affairs Department as Ambassador to the United Arab Republic on the night of 12 September 1961.

And as these COVID times oblige us, in a hybrid format that is fitting to enable so many more people to share this experience and pay their respects.

We also commemorate a French diplomat, a Commercial Attache and his family and household staff at the then United Arab Republic's delegation in Rabat, and colleagues from the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As well as the six members of the Air France crew and all those citizens from France, Morocco, the United States of America, Russia, Luxembourg, Italy, the United Kingdom and Switzerland who perished.

Special mention needs to be made of the indispensable support of Ms El Hnot, here amongst us today, and her team at the Cooperation and Culture Directorate at the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which has contributed greatly to the richness of today's ceremony.

And we are in a position to unveil a plaque and plant this tree as a memorial today because 60 years after the accident Australian diplomats are continuing to develop bilateral relations with Morocco from our permanent embassy premises here in Rabat in 2021, a year that also marks 45 years of diplomatic relations.

It is clear from the contemporaneous news reporting that this accident had an enormous impact.

I can't help but share the feelings and emotions of those on the ground in Rabat, waiting at the airport and at home expecting the arrival of loved ones at the time and in the immediate aftermath of the crash.

And all those first responders and authorities who would have been confronted by such tragic scenes, as they worked through the night and next days...

I think of the broader impact on all the families, friends and workplaces of the deceased in Morocco and France and around the world, as well as in Australia, as news filtered through and fearing the worst.

The Secretary of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has provided the following words to John Quinn for today's ceremony.

"Your father was one of the distinguished pioneers of the Department. I hope that you and your family, as well as families of all other flight passengers and crew, will feel that gathering in Rabat will be a worthy remembrance."

I'd also like to recall the words of the then Australian Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Sir Robert Menzies, who paid the following tribute to John Paul Quinn at the time:

"John Quinn has passed from us at the height of his powers and with the promise of adding greatly to his already considerable achievements in the service of Australia.

He combined great intellectual power, complete integrity of character and a sympathetic approach to his fellows.

He showed great courage during his internment in Sumatra and Singapore and recovered to give outstanding service both at home in the Department of External Affairs and abroad as a representative of Australia.

My colleagues and I greatly value all that John Quinn did for Australia and we offer our deep sympathy to his wife, children and parents.”

1961 was a challenging period for international diplomacy. John Paul Quinn’s skills were never more in demand.

The Cold War was in full flight with the Berlin Wall commencing construction.

The beginning of the Non-Aligned Movement and a visit by the Indonesian President Sukharno and Mali President Modibo Keita to Morocco and a meeting with His Majesty Hassan II all occurred in that same year.

JFK was sworn as the 35th President of the USA in January.

And the space race was in full flight with the Soviet Cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, becoming the first human to fly in space.

Today’s ceremony gives us cause to reflect on the challenges and dangers those of us who work as public servants for our countries overseas can face.

The US State Department and the American Foreign Service Association have established a process that memorialises all American consular and diplomatic staff who have died under tragic or heroic circumstances.

“It serves, and I quote, as a means of bringing home to the people of this country [the USA] the fact that we have a service in our government devoted to peaceful intercourse between the nations and the assistance of our peaceful commerce which, nevertheless, may occasionally exact from its servants a sacrifice the same as that which we expect from our soldiers and our sailors.”

Its second purpose is to “serve in the development in our present service—the successors of the men and women whose names are recorded here—of that same spirit of devotion and sacrifice which those men and women evidenced.”

Our commemoration ceremony today of the late John Paul Quinn is a call to all those of us and our compatriots who are currently serving their country to show the same spirit of devotion and sacrifice those men and women displayed.

Let today’s ceremony also be a further step forward in a cross-cultural dialogue that bridges time, places, cultures and civilisations.

To send a message to the world in these volatile times that reconciliation and peace are the only true way forward for the peoples of the world to live in mutual understanding.

And, finally, a special thanks to John Quinn, through a son’s love for his father, leading us to this special place today.

Thank you.