

**Speech given by Bailiff
Liberation Day service
9 May 2008**

I am sure that many of those who were here in May 1945 will remember the old saying that one of the first casualties of war is the truth. This year we have learnt that even in peacetime, once a media bandwagon starts rolling, it is difficult to distinguish what is true from what is fictitious. Liberation Day is as good a time as any to take stock and to shake ourselves free of the misinformation to which the child abuse inquiry has given rise. It is extraordinary how quickly it all happened. It all started with the discovery of a fragment of a child's skull and a sniffer dog who showed interest in six different sites. Within days newspapers and broadcasters had converted that information into stories of finding six or more bodies of children, and within two weeks those stories had crossed the world feeding a frenzy of righteous indignation and further lurid speculation. A cover-up by government was suggested, and there was incredulity that local people had not noticed these sinister events. Unjustified smears about wholesale collaboration during the occupation led to suggestions that the Island was full of dark secrets and that ours was a community that cared nothing for vulnerable children.

Now we know that the fragment of skull is at least 60 years old and possibly very much older than that. Of course things may change, but there are as yet no bodies, no evidence of any murder, and no evidence of cover-ups by government. Hardly any of this has been beamed across the world. Yet many journalists continue to write about the Island's so called child abuse scandal. All child abuse, wherever it happens, is scandalous, but it is the unjustified and remorseless denigration of Jersey and her people that is the real scandal. The simple truth is that we do not yet know what happened at Haut de la Garenne or in other places. What we do know is that a rigorous investigation is taking place and, in due course, a balanced judgement will be possible. A brave writer in the Guardian earlier this week was the first journalist in a national newspaper, so far as I know, to confront this truth.

Confronting the past, which is one aspect of confronting the truth, is of course not always easy. After all, it took us some time to confront the uncomfortable truths about the occupation; to acknowledge publicly the elements of collaboration and profiteering that took place; and to remember the suffering of the slave workers and the hardships of the deportees. It also took time to acknowledge the heroism of those who rebelled against the occupiers in ways large and small, and the courage of those who sheltered escaped prisoners at great risk to themselves. It was easier to try to forget the painful memories of enemy occupation. But we have now confronted the gremlins, and this annual celebration of Liberation Day is a means of remembering the lessons of the past. Of course, it is also the opportunity for those who were in Jersey on 9th May 1945 to recall the jubilation and intoxicating excitement that people felt when the nightmare was over and freedom was restored. This celebration is also the chance for younger people to learn more about the occupation, and its significance in the story of our Island race, and to honour the perseverance and courage of their elders.

Confronting difficult situations is sometimes no easier than confronting the past. I was struck recently by a letter in the Jersey Evening Post from someone who was comparing her own experience in the Island with the appalling report of a man in the north of England who collapsed and was dying by the roadside, and who was ignored by numerous motorists including one who drove over the poor man's leg and broke it. Our letter writer had also come across an injured man sitting on the side of a country lane and had watched as a driver in front of her carefully negotiated his car around the man and drove off. She stopped and called an ambulance, but was lamenting that such callousness could happen in Jersey. Sadly, such stories are as old as the hills. If only one person drove around the injured man, we are in fact doing rather better than the men in the biblical

story where both the priest and the Levite passed by the injured traveller on the other side of the road before the Good Samaritan came along. The letter writer set a fine example. Confronting the situation and showing personal responsibility for one's actions are qualities to which we can all aspire.

I do not believe that Jersey is an uncaring society. On the contrary, there is a strong political will to protect the poor and vulnerable in the community and to correct any mistakes of the past. Of course Jersey is not Utopia, and there are many problems to resolve. But equally we have much for which to be grateful.

Today our guest of honour is His Excellency Dr Alberto Jardim, the President of Madeira and I extend a very warm welcome to him and to Mrs Jardim. Our own Musical Original singers have just returned from Funchal where they were royally received. I am delighted to say that we have a group of young visiting musicians from Madeira in Liberation Square today. I hope that the President's visit will lead to many more cultural exchanges of this kind between two Island communities which have more in common than one might think.

I also extend a warm welcome to Colonel Alexey Korkach, Air Attaché from the Russian embassy and to Señor Alveraz Garrido, First Secretary to the Spanish Embassy, who will both be at Westmount this afternoon but who are also in the Square for our celebration this morning. And finally may I thank all the senior citizens from the parishes who have made this annual pilgrimage to Liberation Square. Whether you were one of those in occupied Jersey or one of those evacuated to the UK, you collectively kept alive the flame of freedom and worked to create out of the ruins of 1945 the vibrant and successful community we now have. You are the most important people in the Square. Thank you for being here.