**LAUDATION**

**Of Lord Alton of Liverpool,**

**on the occasion of his investiture by the Hungarian Government**

**with the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary**

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to announce that Mr János Áder, President of the Republic of Hungary presents and awards the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary to Lord Alton of Liverpool in recognition of the supportive role he played during the festive week last May dedicated to St Thomas Becket, highlighting British-Hungarian cultural ties at the highest levels, and also in recognition for his long standing activity in preserving and protecting the values of our shared Christian culture.

**LAUDATION**

Exceptional and rare is the occasion when the cultural ties of two countries, different in size and in every aspect of global influence get week-long publicity, as it happened in the case of the United Kingdom and Hungary last May, when the relic of the Martyr Archbishop of Canterbury, returned to England after 800 years in Esztergom.

Thanks to the great respect Lord Alton commands following his 40 years of service in British Culture and Politics, his involvement in Becket Week allowed for considerable support from Ecclesiastical and Political circles. His Lordship was encouraging to my predecessor from the moment this ideas was suggested and truly aided the endeavour all the way to its conclusion.

Thanks to Lord Alton’s ceaseless tenacity many thousands of people came to realise that the relations of the ancient Kingdoms of England and Hungary have deep roots going back over 800 years. The festive week dedicated to St Thomas Becket provided our nations an important lesson: that it is not only common geopolitical interests that lay down the bed for two nations’ friendship, but also the spiritual principles on which the people of a country build their lives and their vision of the future. Bringing a spiritual dimension to international diplomacy reminds us all that when nation speaks to nation, heart must also speak to heart.

The heroic self-devotion of the great Englishman, St Thomas Becket, in defending the right to religious freedom and the independence of the Church has addressed a question that has always evoked strong resonance in the heart of the Hungarian people.

Becket week was not envisaged to glorify the past, but to remind British and Hungarians of the heroism of Thomas Becket and others in defending the freedoms we enjoy in society today. Let us not forget that it is where heroes are not forgotten, that new hopes are born.

Lord Alton has not only been a contact point and a well-respected counsellor for the Hungarian Embassy; he was not only a human echo to our voice inviting people to the events of the Becket-week; but he stood in front of the press and public as a civic authority behind the message he has shared with Hungary about the dangers Christianity is facing today, here in Western Europe too and around the world.

In his time Lord Alton was the youngest member of the House of Commons. The mission he assumed then accompanied him throughout the intervening decades, and - as we see him standing among us – has kept him young in spirit. Being an advocate for human rights he has campaigned and spoken up on behalf of people of Burma, Tibet, Darfur or North Korea, all of whom he has visited, endangered in life and belief, which requires high spirit and principles.

In the last decades a new challenge has emerged, not only for Lord Alton, but for the entire people of Christ belonging to all denominations. The challenge is to curb the aggressive secularization of society, supposedly for its’ benefit, while in truth stripping it of the principles on which our nations are built. With both his example and public advocacy Lord Alton has given a clear response to the claims that Christians, and the Christian Churches should stay away from public affairs and political issues. Lord Alton has time and again highlighted the part that faith plays in the lives of individuals who serve society and also the institutional work that the Christian churches do for the benefit of all. Silencing any voice is always detrimental to society.

Recently Lord Alton has been speaking out against the persecution and genocide being committed against Christians and others, particularly in Syria and Iraq. Lord’s Alton’s message is clear and should be heeded that anyone persecuted for his or her religion or belief is to be defended and helped. It is saddening that this is not always the opinion of many who seem to equate supporting Christianity with being politically incorrect.

We saw that not being PC, politically correct, can have dramatic consequences, as with the case of St Thomas Becket. He instead had religious, and political courage, and while he lost his life for his courage, his country and others including my own, have been inspired by his sacrifice to maintain the freedoms that no one had the right to deny. It is the privilege and duty of being citizens, politicians, and diplomats of Christian democracies that we remind all that the laws of man must conform to the laws of God, and not the laws of God conform to those of man.It is our duty to uphold the sanctity dignity of every human life.

As I announced by way of introduction the President of Hungary presents and awards the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary to Lord Alton of Liverpool in recognition of the role he played as the main supporter of the festive week last May dedicated to St Thomas Becket, and for the decades-long outstanding activity in preserving and protecting the values of Christian culture in society. I wish to add to this that my Government, and the members of the Government who Lord Alton knows in person, including Prime Minister Victor Orbán strongly wishes to continue to work closely together for the benefit of the people of our countries and the world.