

*Speech for HSH the Prince
Centenary of Robert Falcon Scott's expedition to the South Pole
Cambridge, 17 January 2012*

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I was delighted to be able to accept your invitation and join you in this celebration which touches me profoundly.

It touches me because, three years ago, I was fortunate enough to be able to walk in Robert Falcon Scott's footsteps in Antarctica to reach the South Pole.

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It also touches me because I am descended from a man who was fascinated by the Poles and I learned from a very early age to admire the courage and heroism of the men who were driven to surpass themselves and take tremendous risks to help humankind progress. Of course, my great-great-grandfather Prince Albert I never went to Antarctica since his explorations led him across the oceans to Spitsbergen. But he was a contemporary of Robert Falcon Scott's and faced the same technical hurdles, which are hard for us to imagine now. I must admit I thought often of them during my two polar expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic...

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A hundred years after Roald Amundsen and Robert Falcon Scott's first successful expeditions to the South Pole, the celebration of their feats takes on new meaning today. This is not only an opportunity for us to commemorate their technical and sporting achievements, but it also allows us to honour the foresight of these men who managed to bring us close to previously unknown lands. Through their impact in the press and the popularity that accompanied them, their expeditions enabled the peoples of Europe to become interested in these regions so unfamiliar to them.

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A century later, this provides an example which gives us much food for thought. Indeed, the matter of the Poles has, since, become crucial for our Planet: because these regulators essential to our climate and our biosphere are in serious jeopardy today.

We know the hazards threatening them: global warming and the melting of glaciers, of course, but also the ensuing decline in biodiversity and oceans acidification. These major perils weigh on the conditions of our very existence. If we do nothing, we may end up bequeathing to our children a hostile broken world.

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But nothing in this is inevitable. We can still take action, on condition we have the courage to pursue the necessary reforms; on condition of being able to challenge the very principles of development too often based on the destruction of natural resources; on condition of being able to look beyond our immediate interests and address the needs of future generations.

This is obviously a daunting challenge, but it can also be construed as a fascinating adventure - an adventure in which Robert Falcon Scott's example can only encourage us.

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To meet this challenge, we must find new meaning in the desire to push back our limits ever further and in the effort that inspired him a century ago in the icy deserts of Antarctica.

It is to honour his courage and find inspiration in his resolve that I really wanted to be here today with you to pay tribute to Robert Falcon Scott.

Thank you.