



Ambassador's Activities

2015

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**Speech by H.E. Sylvie Bermann,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom,
at the ceremony to award the insignia
of *Chevalier* in the *Ordre national du Mérite*
to Ms Ann Kenrick, Secretary-General of the British section
of the Franco-British Council
at the French Residence on 15 April 2015**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Former prime minister Edward Heath used to say that “a diplomat is a man who thinks twice before he says nothing”. Yet when he and President Georges Pompidou set up the Franco-British Council in 1972, they had definitely pledged to commit France and Britain to a close partnership. The FBC has lived up to expectations ever since its creation, fostering dialogue between our two countries’ political figures, our most senior civil servants, economists, researchers and journalists, and people in various fields such as the economy, the environment, defence and culture.

So I am very pleased to welcome the woman who heads it, Ann Kenrick, to the French Residence tonight, on this very special occasion.

Chère Ann, you have indeed played a major role in our bilateral relationship, wholeheartedly and effectively committing yourself to the post of Secretary-General of the Council’s British Section. By deploying your talents in management, event organization and fundraising, for 20 years you have used your great abilities and innovative spirit to serve Franco-British friendship.

Your passion for France and the French language was born after you spent a term in a small village school in the Massif Central, in the heart of rural France. This charming, beautiful, unspoilt region, the heart of what we call “*la douce France*”, was to have a profound effect on you, so much so that you later went on to complete a Master’s degree in French and German at Oxford University.

As if that were not enough, you encouraged and inspired your family to do the same. Your husband Mark speaks fluent French. And when your three children were small, you took them out of school in London to live in a small French village – not in the Massif Central this time, but in the Lot – and attend the local school. Since then, they’ve been on many exchanges and worked in France.

But let me go back to your career. The least we can say is that you’ve followed an atypical path. You spent 15 years working in the heavy engineering sector in French-speaking West Africa, and later as Senior Marketing Executive at IBM UK.

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The experience and managerial skills you acquired there were certainly paramount in your many successes at the FBC. Thanks to your efforts and dynamism, for example during the FBC's 40th anniversary in 2012, the FBC now enjoys crucial visibility in Franco-British partnerships.

It has become customary for institutions across the Channel to work with the FBC's staff, and you in particular. For instance, the FBC was asked to organize the President's visit to London in 2008, and, very recently, to host the visit paid by the French Vice-Chief of Staff and Chief of Air Staff to their British counterparts at the French Residence in London. Such high-profile events were only made possible thanks to your dedication and involvement.

Other achievements of yours that we can list include building partnerships with chambers of commerce and embassies, organizing seminars to raise awareness about subjects of topical interest to the two countries, and even overseeing the publication of a popular book celebrating 100 years of the Entente Cordiale.

Chère Ann, you not only make an outstanding contribution to the vitality of Franco-British relations, you're a model citizen as well. You are strongly committed to protecting the environment through organizations such as the Groundwork Trust, with which you got involved in a rehabilitation project for a sensitive urban area in 1994. You also champion the place of women in society, participating in programmes for schoolgirls about women in business and management.

Moreover, you are dedicated to promoting sport in general, and, I believe, cycling in particular. You've cycled seven times from London to Paris for charity, and you've raised over £350,000 from Transport for London for major cycling improvements. You've also contributed to the work of the London Cycling Campaign as a Trustee, for which you received a Southwark Civic Award.

Perhaps it was your parents' dedication to others and their involvement in charity work that gave you your taste for selfless service. Your involvement in so many areas has earned you respect and shows how actively engaged a citizen you are, and how much you deserve the honour that the French Republic wishes to award you.

Pour toutes ces raisons, chère Ann Kenrick, au nom du Président de la République et en vertu des pouvoirs qui nous sont conférés, nous vous faisons Chevalier de l'Ordre national du mérite.