



Barbara Mills KC, Chair of the Bar
Speech for the swearing in of the new Lord Chancellor,
Rt Hon David Lammy MP
Wednesday 1 October 2025, Court 4

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

My Lady,

On behalf of the Bar of England and Wales, may I welcome the new Lord Chancellor and Solicitor General at their swearing in and declaration.

This historic occasion celebrates another milestone in our country's rich story as I stand here as the first black Chair of the Bar to address the first black Lord Chancellor. Today also marks the Opening of the Legal Year, and as we welcome distinguished lawyers and judges from across the world to join us today, I am proud that we remain an attractive jurisdiction not only because London is the destination of choice for the resolution of international disputes but also because our legal system leads the way on issues of equality and representation – for all our communities.

Lord Chancellor, called to the Bar in 1994 by Lincoln's Inn, and having spent time in and around justice policy throughout your long career - both in Government and Opposition – you bring a deep knowledge and understanding of our justice system, the need to defend the rule of law and the immense contribution that legal services make to the economy.

This background and experience provides you with a unique understanding of the root causes of many of the challenges in our justice system: from the backlogs and delays to the cuts to legal aid preventing access to justice and compromising the sustainability of the legal professions. Many of these issues remain the same since you were Shadow Lord Chancellor and indeed a Minister in the last Labour Government.

At a time when community cohesion is under considerable strain, the Lord Chancellor's historic duty to defend the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary is more critical than ever.

As the late Lord Bingham said:

"In a world divided by differences of nationality, race, colour, religion and wealth [the rule of law] is one of the greatest unifying factors, perhaps the greatest, the nearest we are likely to approach to a universal secular religion."

Attacks on lawyers and associating them with their clients has become a depressingly regular occurrence. Maintaining public trust is essential to a functioning democracy. Across the legal profession, we stand united in our resolve to ensure that the public understands the critical role we play in ensuring a democratic, civilised, fair society – in spite of the increasingly hostile environment in which lawyers and judges have to operate.

It is important to re-state, as many former Chairs of the Bar have, that the Bar Council does not take party political positions. Our interactions with the Government are to ensure that we have an effective, functioning justice system and that the rule of law is upheld.

There are a range of issues that require your immediate attention, as our new Lord Chancellor. Some reforms are underway, but the Government has an ambitious agenda on sentencing, prisons, criminal courts and halving violence against women and girls, to name but a few. Getting the basic infrastructure right and providing sufficient resource to allow our strong, proud and globally renowned institutions to function efficiently is key to delivering long term success. We hope that the combined position of Lord Chancellor and Deputy Prime Minister will provide many opportunities to promote the role legal services play both to the economy and society.

We also look forward to working with the new Solicitor General, who was called to the Bar in 2003 by my Inn, Inner Temple. As Shadow Solicitor General, the Bar Council worked with you on a range of issues particularly around sustainability of the criminal Bar and retention of female barristers.

The Bar, therefore, wishes to endorse my Lady, the Lady Chief Justice's words, and to congratulate both the Lord Chancellor and, the Solicitor General on their appointments.

I said in opening that I was speaking on behalf of the Bar of England and Wales.

I should add that the Dean of the Faculty of Advocates of Scotland, Roddy Dunlop KC, and the Chair of the Bar of Northern Ireland, Donall Lunny KC, have both asked me to convey their congratulations and warm welcome.

We look forward to working with the Lord Chancellor and Solicitor General to ensure that the rule of law in England and Wales is upheld, trust and confidence in our justice system is restored, and that the strong relationship that has been enjoyed by the Bar Council with the Lord Chancellor and Law Officers long continues.

Lord Chancellor, Solicitor General - We wish you both well.

ENDS