The American Bar Association has long recognized the seminal importance of Magna Carta. In 1957, the ABA solicited donations from members to erect this Memorial to the legacy of Magna Carta. Since then, ABA representatives returned in 1971, 1985, and 2000 to rededicate this Memorial and recommit to the tenets of Magna Carta.

Today, we return to again demonstrate our commitment to the rule of law. Some things are different. The Memorial has been refurbished; benches, paving stones, and lights have been added through renewed generosity.

But while some things have changed, the overarching message remains constant: Magna Carta has advanced important human rights through the centuries and throughout democracies across the world. The barons and King John could scarcely have imagined when they stood in this meadow 800 years ago today that the words to which they agreed would launch the progression of the rule of law.

In this field were born precepts that made possible the United States Constitution, the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the framework of justice in America, the United Kingdom, and much of the world.

I am honored today to stand on this hallowed ground where, in 1957, the ABA first honored Magna Carta through this monument.
I am privileged to be here in England, as former ABA President and Supreme Court Justice Lewis S. Powell was 50 years ago on the 750th anniversary of Magna Carta. Then, as we do now, he extolled the close relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom in a speech at the Royal Courts of Justice. He said, “In war and peace our nations have sustained the same ideals and the same principles that we proudly attribute to Magna Carta.”

I am humbled to help rededicate this Memorial as former Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan did 30 years ago when he said, “It is indeed fitting that free peoples periodically restate their debt to the principles of the Great Charter.”

We return to Runnymede today because the principles of Magna Carta define, and must continue to define, who we are and who we must be if we are to have justice and if we are to have peace in our world.

We must rededicate and reconsecrate the ideals that are carved in this Memorial: Freedom Under Law.

Indeed, without the law, there is no freedom. Without freedom, there is no fulfillment of human potential.

Let us today celebrate Magna Carta. And today, and in the days ahead, let us fan the flame of freedom that Magna Carta ignited.