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PRIME MINISTER OPENS 25TH ANNIVERSARY BOOK FESTIVAL

The Prime Minister opened the 25th Anniversary Edinburgh International Book Festival this morning in a sold-out, wide-ranging and warmly received interview with Edinburgh author, Ian Rankin. Commenting on the crucial role of the Book Festival in fostering political debate he reminisced on his first visit to the inaugural Edinburgh International Book Festival in 1983 – the year he first stood as an MP.

Discussing his books *Courage* and *Everyday Heroes*, Gordon Brown talked of the importance of restoring democracy to Burma and paid tribute to Aung San Suu Kyi, saying he wanted to see her free. Pressed to identify the quality of courage, he described it as a determination to bring about change regardless of danger to self. He professed the depths of his admiration of Nelson Mandela as an example of this – and remarked on how Mandela remained without bitterness despite all that had happened to him.

An important theme of the discussion was the cultural changes, coming from the community as well as the government, required in the 21st century to take forward the great gains of the 20th century – the ending of imperialism, fascism and the Cold War. He spoke of how the global financial crisis made the great causes of eliminating poverty and hunger more not less pressing, in an increasingly interlinked world.

Brown spoke of his belief that the many connections at every level between Scotland and the rest of the UK made independence an unviable option – and that issues such as climate change and global security affected every part of our island equally.

Catherine Lockerbie, director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival said “It was an honour and a delight to have the Prime Minister speak at the first event of our special anniversary festival – something we’ve been working on for some months. The conversation with Ian Rankin was highly engaging: wide-ranging, passionate, personal and political and allowed the audience to see the real qualities of Gordon Brown. It was a very successful event with a warm and positive response from the audience. We couldn’t have asked for a better or more appropriate opening.”

Ian Rankin said “It was nice to see Gordon Brown somewhere other than Stark’s Park and to find him relaxed and chatty after his summer break.”

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