

King Felipe VI of Spain speaks of shared heritage in Miami



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Associated Press

In his first visit to Florida since taking the throne, King Felipe VI of Spain on Thursday emphasized the shared heritage between Spain and the United States and encouraged Miami Dade College students from immigrant families not to feel torn in their loyalty between two countries.

Felipe delivered the message during the college's fall commencement at the historic Freedom Tower, the first stop in the United States for thousands of newly arrived Cuban immigrants in the 1960s.

The message was a poignant one for the hundreds in the crowd, including a large number of Cuban American students.

"Hispanics in the United States have many reasons to feel proud and one of the reasons is to have the privileged heritage of two global cultures," he said.

Felipe drew laughter when he spoke of someone who is 'no-lingual' and treats their mother tongue like a foreign language.

"All of us, together, could make it possible for these 'no-linguals' to not feel deprived of a cultural heritage, since their situation between two languages gives them access to two infinitely rich worlds. Those of Miguel de Cervantes and of William Shakespeare," he said.

Felipe, 47, was proclaimed king a little more than a year ago, replacing his scandal-ridden father, former King Juan Carlos. He pledged to restore trust in the monarchy and even stripped his sister Princess Cristina of her title as Duchess of Palma de Mallorca over the summer in the latest move to distance the royal family as she awaits trial for tax fraud along with her husband.

The case was one of many scandals that eroded the once immense popularity of Juan Carlos. The former king also sparked public anger by taking a secret elephant-hunting trip to Botswana in 2012 at the height of Spain's financial crisis.

Over the year, Felipe has also moved to clean up the institution's image by subjecting palace accounts to external audits and making the results public.

The king was accompanied Thursday by his wife, Queen Letizia. Felipe met with President Barack Obama earlier this week at the White House, where they discussed the importance of working together to ensure refugees, especially Syrian refugees, are safe and treated with "shared humanity," the king said.

The royal couple will head to the oldest city in the United States on Friday — St. Augustine, Florida — where they planned to tour the centuries-old castle and other historic Spanish sites in their country's former colony.