



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

ADDRESS BY Mr. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE FRENCH REPUBLIC

ON THE OCCASION OF THE DECORATION OF MR. JOSEPH S. BLATTER, PRESIDENT OF FIFA,
AND THE CENTENNIAL YEAR OF FIFA

ELYSÉE PALACE

MONDAY, 17 MAY 2004

Minister, Presidents, Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. President, my dear Mr. Blatter,

It is with very great pleasure that I welcome you here today in the Elysée to celebrate FIFA's Centennial year and to decorate its President, in the name of France.

FIFA is always welcome in France. For Paris witnessed the birth of your Federation, just a few yards from here, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, on the premises of the Union des Sociétés Françaises de Sports Athlétiques. It was there that on 21 May 1904, seven European nations, among them Switzerland, signed the foundation act of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association. They appointed as its President a Frenchman, Robert Guérin, and a little later FIFA chose French as its official language, doing so under the Presidency of an Englishman, Daniel Burley Woolfall.

I know that Presidents Simonet and Thiriez, as well as Michel Platini of course, are always concerned to consolidate and strengthen further these special bonds between FIFA and France. * In a hundred years of activity and passion, FIFA has grown. Football has made its mark as a social phenomenon on a planetary scale.

The 20th century may be recorded in the history of nations in letters of fire and iron, it may have witnessed the most sombre of tragedies, but it was also the century of sport, with its magical moments of communion between peoples, its eternal message of hope and friendship.

In the space of a hundred years, sport has ceased to be the pastime of a privileged elite, becoming a universal language shared by all the world's citizens. In this history, your discipline has played a prominent role, one of popular emotion and fervour: the attraction of football, its fascination, the moments of happiness it is able to create make it a highly effective introduction to active participation in sport everywhere in the world.

A hundred years ago, FIFA's founding fathers foresaw this unifying role of football, a sport that brings together 204 member countries in your official



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bodies - more than any other international organisation. They have sought constantly to spread this generous, fraternal and humanist ideal, one to which over 250 million licensed players have rallied worldwide.

Today, football speaks all languages. Everywhere it spreads, it adapts to the local culture, it bonds with national and popular traditions, it transcends social distinctions. As a sport of all peoples, it is everywhere the sport of the people, the sport that puts all on an equal footing, excites enthusiasm and makes a country's hearts beat in unison.

I have experienced such exceptional moments of happiness and fraternity, sharing them with the whole French people at the World Cup 1998, which remains forever engraved in our hearts and in our memories.

Today, football is more than a sport, more than an enthusiasm. It is also an economy generating employment throughout the world, it is a culture, an ethic, a chance of success for young people in many countries and at the same time a magnificent instrument for the promotion of peace. * Indeed, present as it is throughout the world, football carries with it an ideal.

FIFA embodies that humanism. Its roots are in the same visionary spirit as that which fired Pierre de Coubertin when he woke the Olympic Games from their millennial sleep. It lives in the conviction that the stadium must replace the battlefield, that peace can spring from fair competition between opponents' efforts, talents and generosity.

It was such certainty that drove the seven founding nations to open up the ranks of their federation and go beyond the borders of Europe, as early as before the First World War. It is this which, during that conflict, led FIFA to maintain a link between the warring nations and to keep alive the flame of sport and friendship. * FIFA has in this way won a place as the guardian of values with which all peoples can identify. From the outset, it has fought to ensure that the Rules of the Game, sportsmanship and sacrosanct respect for the opponent prevail on the pitch. It continues to defend these values vigilantly, not only by punishing aggressive behaviour but also by rewarding fair play each year with one of its most pleasing awards.

Today, you are leading the fight for the values of sport, setting as your goals equity and the health of athletes, of young people whose eyes are constantly raised toward their champions as examples to emulate.

On the occasion of your Centennial, you will be officially signing up to the World Anti-Doping Code, in the presence of Jacques Rogge, President of the International Olympic Committee. This is a major act, one that puts the entire weight and authority of your Federation behind the fight against doping, the poison that is destructive of the very spirit of sport. I wish to salute this step forward, in the name of France, which has for several years been working tirelessly to bring about a convergence of policies in this field. * * * Any evocation of FIFA's history inevitably involves paying homage to its founders,



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to those who have helped it develop, and who formed the strongest of teams, of whom you are, my dear President Blatter, one of the most worthy successors.

Here in France, it is only natural that I should spare a thought for the memory of Jules Rimet, the father of the World Cup, who gave his name to the legendary trophy that is the dream of every nation.

I wish also to salute Doctor João Havelange, who honours us here today with his presence and who has left such a strong personal imprint on the history of your Federation and of sport. A Brazilian by birth, he felt intuitively that football's success would be founded ever more firmly on countries and continents opening up to the sport. He has made FIFA a fully-fledged actor in sports diplomacy, using sport to help make possible hitherto unthinkable rapprochements.

Your own actions, my dear President Blatter, have followed those same ideals.

By putting you at its helm in 1998, and by offering you a further term in 2002, FIFA chose not only great experience but also a humanist vision of football.

I say great experience because your career makes you one of those best able to understand the football of today, to keep alive the spirit, the human and sporting dimensions of this discipline and to achieve mastery of its economic, diplomatic and international issues.

As a public figure in the world of sport, you were, over a period of 25 years, a footballer in the Swiss amateur premier league, and later a club manager.

Your career has been richly diverse: after graduating from the Law Faculty of Lausanne University, you took on the promotion of tourism in Valais, prior to becoming the General Secretary of the Swiss Ice Hockey Federation and subsequently going into journalism and corporate relations with the world of sport. It was in this capacity that you took part in the organisation of the Olympic Games in 1972 and 1976, coming into contact with the international sports scene.

With your passion for football as a focus, you have in this way gained extensive experience in contacts with the worlds of business, journalism and public relations. Such eclecticism feeds into the broad, generous vision you have of your discipline. It is a faithful reflection of the thousand facets of football today.

Your experience within FIFA is exceptional. Since 1975, when you were appointed Director of Technical Development Programmes, you have held all possible positions. Over the last three decades of profound change, you are among those who have made FIFA what it is today: one of the most important voices for sport in the world, as well as a respected actor in diplomacy and humanitarian action.



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It was those qualities that led the International Olympic Committee to invite you to join it in 1999.

For your work at the head of FIFA is also driven by a vision and philosophy of football.

Firstly, there is the conviction that football is universal, that the game belongs to all men and women: I mention women deliberately because you have sought to ensure that FIFA accords women's competitions their rightful place.

Football is for you an instrument in support of the equal dignity of all peoples, a means enabling numerous countries to achieve full recognition. It is no accident that, following on from Asia in 2002, you have worked to ensure that Africa will be host to the FIFA World Cup in 2010 for the first time.

Universal in scope, the football you defend also serves diplomacy and humanitarian action. We saw this recently in the 2002 World Cup, which contributed to a historic rapprochement between Japan and Korea.

Your heart is also set on the mobilisation of football in support of solidarity. FIFA assists associations working in poor countries under an ambitious programme of financial and development aid. In 1998, the World Cup was dedicated to a humanitarian cause for the first time. Through football and the extraordinary response it evokes everywhere, FIFA actively supports campaigns for the prevention of infectious diseases and the great pandemics, notably in Africa.

To conclude, your love of football is fuelled by a need to educate people in respect for others. For thirty years, you have never ceased to work for young people. By organising major competitions in which junior teams from around the world battle with each other. By supporting the participation of young players from the poorest nations. By launching educational programmes in developing countries.

My dear President Blatter, for thirty years you have been working to preserve the magic of football: a football of the people, the economic dynamics of which remain subservient to the pleasure of the game; a football in which competition transcends itself in fraternal emulation; a football which keeps alive, through the game, the most fundamental values of our society: solidarity, respect for others, and the equal dignity of all peoples.

Your brilliant career, your duties at the summit of international football, make you the embodiment of a strong vision of sport and its role in promoting peace and development. I am particularly pleased to decorate you in the name of the French Republic with the insignia of Chevalier in the Order of the Legion of Honour. |