



Speech by Mr. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic, at the meeting devoted to the Alliance of Civilisations.

BARCELONA, 27 NOVEMBER 2005.

Ladies and gentlemen, Heads of State and of Government,

On the eve of the first Euro-Mediterranean Summit, we meet here today in order to engage in a moment of reflection on the Alliance of Civilisations. I do so willingly because, as I said at UNESCO shortly after the terrorist attacks of 11 September, I see here an urgent priority for our time.

Some feel obliged to prophesy a clash of civilisations in which, they say, we shall see a confrontation between cultures and religions. Their discourse is fuelled by every kind of fear. But we must not accept the trap set for us by those who wish to see human beings, their beliefs and their traditions as opposed to each other. Let us argue for a determination that is political and ethical: one based on reason and tolerance.

What might be the founding principles of the Alliance you invite us to join, dear JosØ Luis? I can see four.

The first is that all cultures are equal in dignity, in their capacity for mutual enrichment with other cultures. In this respect, the Barcelona Process has been an irreplaceable melting pot for dialogue and contact over the last ten years.

The second is the recognition of cultural diversity. The diversity of cultures, of languages, of traditions is threatened by the steamroller effect of globalisation. It is one of the reasons for the evident tensions surrounding issues of identity in the contemporary world. Defence of diversity is now enshrined in international law thanks to the recent signing of the UNESCO Convention. The aim must now be to breathe life into its provisions by acknowledging the right of each country to conduct the cultural policies it sees as most in harmony with its own particular genius, and by emphasising the fact that cultural assets are not goods to be bought and sold.

The third principle is obviously respect. Respect for others, accepting others in their difference from ourselves, an attitude that does not come naturally to human societies. Respect for oneself, which must involve both confidence in one's identity and a capacity to turn a lucid gaze on the past. Respect for the values that are universal, that transcend specific historical experience, affirming the inalienable rights of each individual.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

The last of these principles is solidarity. Our societies in Europe are founded upon that demand. It is the fruit of bitter struggle. In the era of globalisation, that is to say in a world where information spreads instantaneously, that demand is among the indispensable elements of any genuine Alliance, the guarantee of true equality between all human beings from every origin.

In a troubled world in search of its way forward, the Alliance of Civilisations is deserving of our support. France will be an active participant, because the Alliance is in accord with humanism, making it by the same token a vehicle for peace and progress.

Thank you.

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