



## **Statement made by M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, on the Act of 23 February 2005.**

(Paris, 9 December 2005)

The Act of 23 February 2005 is prompting a debate about our national memory. A debate about the history of Overseas France.

France is a great nation. She has a glorious past. Her values are the universal values which radiate throughout the world, those of freedom, justice, law. She bears the imprint of the diversity of the men and women and their backgrounds from which she draws her strength and her wealth. This history is our heritage, our identity, our future, and we must take pride in it.

Like all nations, France has known greatness, known trials, and known moments of light and darker times. This is a legacy we have to accept in its entirety. A legacy we have to accept, paying due regard to everyone's memories, at times wounded memories, which for many of our compatriots form part of their identity.

History is the key to a nation's unity. But it does not take much for history to stir up division, for passions to intensify, for the wounds of the past to reopen.

In the Republic, there's no official history. It's not for legislators to write history. Writing history is the task of historians.

This is why, in response to the controversy aroused by Article 4 of the Act of 23 February 2005, I suggested to the President of the National Assembly, M. Jean-Louis Debrø and he has agreed to this that he establish a commission to assess Parliament's action on remembrance and history. It will have to seek the views of people of all persuasions and call on many historians. The President of the National Assembly has told me that the commission's conclusions could be submitted in three months and I shall pay very close attention to its recommendations.

I am also asking the government to ensure that the Foundation for Remembrance provided for in Article 3 of the Act of 23 February 2005 is set up as soon as possible and given the resources it needs to function effectively.

People now have to calm down. There needs to be a period of tranquil reflection, with due regard for Parliament's prerogatives, true to our ideals of justice, tolerance and respect, in a spirit of unity and coming together.