



## Address by Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, at the French university in Egypt.

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Shuruq (Egypt) - Thursday, april 20th 2006

Mr. President, Madame MUBARAK,  
Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and a great honour for me to be here with you this morning, Mr. President, to inaugurate the French University in Egypt.

The occasion we are marking today has its origins in the convergence of a legacy and a goal.

The legacy is of immeasurable value: two centuries of dialogue and interaction between two nations of high culture that have created bonds of the heart and the mind between our two peoples.

The goal is ambitious: to face the challenges of today's world by educating the future leaders of the globalised 21st century that is taking shape before our eyes.

The challenge that we set for ourselves a number of years ago -to disseminate, here, in French, the knowledge of our time- today becomes a reality. In taking shape in the new city of Shuruq, a symbol of the Egypt you are building with such courage and determination, this common achievement bears witness to the confidence in the future, the view of the world, the vision of the need for dialogue among cultures that we share.

It is first and foremost to you, Mr. President, that the French University in Egypt owes its existence. From the outset, you believed in this new expression of French-Egyptian friendship. It is right and fitting that we pay tribute to you and express our gratitude to you.

It also owes its existence to the many Egyptian friends who had faith in this great and impressive endeavour. I wish to particularly salute Mr. Samir SAWFAT, the former Egyptian Ambassador to Paris and President of the Board of Trustees, Minister Ahmad MAHER, to whom he hands over, Mr. Ali ALHEFNAWI, then Director of the French-Egyptian Business Association, and Mr. Naguib SAWIRIS, whose financial support was decisive. All contributed inexhaustible energy and patience. I wish to convey to them our deep and heartfelt gratitude.



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I wish also to thank the President of the University, Mrs. Tahani OMAR. She succeeded in establishing and leading the outstanding teams that have enabled the new University rapidly to take its place within the great Egyptian university tradition.

A number of French companies, including Vinci, Alcatel, Thalys and Total, also provided invaluable support for this project. Without them, nothing would have been possible. We owe them a debt of gratitude.

Today the French University in Egypt has three schools focused on the technologies of the future. They are designed to meet the needs of an economy that is rapidly modernising against the backdrop of an increasingly globalised world.

I am pleased that the French University in Egypt was able immediately to establish partnerships with leading French institutions. These French-Egyptian partnerships give FUE students a substantial advantage. When they complete their studies, they are awarded a dual French and Egyptian diploma. With its determined focus on the technologies of the future FUE will, I am certain, set an example throughout the Middle East.

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, the French University in Egypt is part of a longstanding tradition of cooperation and friendship between our two countries.

For two hundred years, we have unceasingly gazed at each other, sought to understand each other, fostered a dialogue between our two cultures.

In a variety of ways, Francophilia in Egypt and Egyptomania in France have been the constant source of the mutual respect and admiration, indeed fascination that has driven the rich history of our cultural relations.

I am particularly pleased that this mutual affinity is today finding expression in an institution devoted to the education of the young. It both exemplifies and symbolises the dialogue of cultures that we call for.

To us who have unceasingly engaged in it across the Mediterranean, this dialogue may come naturally; but it is demonstrably also a burning obligation in today's world.

With what is called, by convention, globalisation, peoples, cultures and civilisations have been brought into constant interaction. Everything is known, at all times, from one end of the world to the other. Exchanges of all types have been stepped up. Identities are constantly coming up against other identities in a vast melting pot for which history and education have left most peoples unprepared.



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This enormous change harbours enormous potential for progress, now that humankind has at long last discovered a common destiny and common values. But at the same time it brings with it new dangers. Communication is not always synonymous with comprehension. The feeling of losing one's bearings and the fear prompted by the unlimited scale of globalisation may fuel identity politics and claims. Lack of understanding may, if we are not careful, play into the hands of fanaticism and ignorance may fan the flames of hatred and mutual rejection.

We therefore have a responsibility in this new world, the world of our children, to organise, in a spirit of open-minded respect, the dialogue among peoples, beliefs and cultures.

Faced with the risk of uniformity, cultural diversity must not foment division among people but on the contrary bear proud witness to human ingenuity. At a time when the destinies of peoples are increasingly intertwined, what has been termed the clash of civilizations which is rather, as I said in Riyadh, a clash of ignorance is not a foregone conclusion. Tolerance, respect for others in their individuality, education and culture as an affirmation of humanist values now more than ever form the bedrock on which peace, mutual enrichment and progress stand.

Human values, first among them freedom and democracy, are universal; but they must come from within, must be shaped to fit each national context and be introduced at each country's individual pace. Economic and social progress is the best way to nurture human values, just as it can help to allay international tensions. The spirit of peace will more readily win hearts and minds if peoples feel that they are participants in world trade and not merely spectators or victims. The spirit of peace will more readily spread if the feeling that there is a double standard is laid to rest.

These are wounds that incite and exploit terrorism, which nothing can justify. Terrorism must therefore be fought by every available means, including economic growth and cultural dialogue. Similarly, a genuine solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the source of so much misunderstanding, frustration and suffering, would go a long way toward dispelling the feeling of injustice.

Each of our peoples is proud of its history and its identity. No people can accept an attempt by others to dictate its conduct or its future in defiance of its roots. And yet this is the risk that globalisation entails: rejecting globalisation by barricading oneself against the tide of history would mean cutting oneself off from the world; and giving in to globalisation entirely would be tantamount to relinquishing one's identity.

There is a different way -the course which France and Egypt seek to chart: it consists in accepting the world as it is, but asserting one's full independence within it. This is why it is crucially important to excel in what constitutes the strength of modern nations- the knowledge economy and openness to world



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trade. This different way consists in proposing to other peoples that we work together to build a harmonious world under UN auspices in the name of the universal values that underpin its Charter, but also in the spirit of sovereign equality among States. In this manner, with each people feeling itself respected, humankind can turn globalization to best advantage.

Throughout their common history, Egypt and France have unremittingly sought to put these beliefs into practice. They are both participants in the great undertaking of Francophony, a forum for cultural dialogue and a driver of diversity. The French University in Egypt is a further illustration of this common determination. A shared Euro-Mediterranean ambition brings us together, with a special focus on education. A project for an Alliance of Civilizations was discussed at the Barcelona Summit. I call on this new university to assert itself as the emblematic institution supporting such an alliance. May this university also, for the sake of all peoples, bear living witness to the strength of dialogue against the sterile and destructive temptation of obscurantism, and may it be a manifest symbol of the confidence we share in a world at peace, in a world of greater justice.

Thank you.

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