



Speech by the President of the French Republic at the opening Ceremony of the international Conference on Drug Routes (Paris - Thursday 22 May 2003).

Ministers,
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished delegates,

Drug routes run through human misery, bringing distress, disease, poverty and crime. Exploring drug routes, as you are about to do, means delving into the heart of human societies, grasping their fantasies, vices and weaknesses

We must approach these routes with an open mind, leaving aside ideology and prejudice. Because, at every step, we will encounter complex and difficult problems. We can only answer them with unwavering firmness combined with a great deal of generosity, a willingness to listen and to learn from each other's experience.

I would like to thank you for accepting the invitation of the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, who wanted to revive our mobilisation in the face of this menace.

You know France's position: drugs are a form of gangrene that threatens all countries affected by drug traffic, including countries that produce, traffic or consume drugs. This gangrene has spread to all continents and has been exacerbated by globalisation. We need to fight this gangrene in every one of its dimensions, long before drugs are carried over drug routes. This fight calls for a combination of approaches, including law enforcement, health and social action, and economic and financial measures and we must attack on the domestic, regional and international fronts.

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Today we are concerned and mobilised by Afghanistan, because what is happening there is a threat to its own stability, that of its neighbours and to international security.

Just over a year ago, Afghanistan freed itself from the Talibans, who had terrorised their own great people and provided a support base for terrorist networks throughout the world.

We were delighted to see this long-suffering country finally take its first steps towards peace and reconstruction. The international community is



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providing it with active support by backing the Bonn and Tokyo processes, by the presence of its armed forces and that of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative and his teams.

I am delighted to greet Mr Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is here with us today. I would like to express our appreciation of the courage and wisdom of President Hamid Karzai and his government, of his resolute action in the face of his huge task. I would like to express France's support and friendship.

Through a terrible chain of circumstances, Afghanistan has become one of the world's leading opium producers in the space of a few years. It earned this sad honour during a time of conflict and an absence of government, when faced with the necessities of survival and in response to a strong external demand for opium and heroin.

Despite the ban upheld by the Afghan government in January 2002, the United Nations reports that opium now accounts for one fifth of Afghanistan's national income. The response is through law enforcement. Afghanistan, which must rebuild everything, must also build a security system. It is now doing so with the assistance of the international community. But we also know that we have to offer an alternative to the three million Afghans who now earn their living by producing drugs, and that development strategies will not produce results until several years from now. We must take energetic measures to attack the whole market the ever-stronger external demand as well as the supply. This is the issue for your conference.

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Dealing with the problem of drug routes highlights the interdependence of today's world. It proposes a new and comprehensive approach. It both supports the efforts to eradicate production and helps mobilise the "consumer" countries so that they curb their domestic demand and so that they fight the effects of drugs and drug trafficking more effectively.

I fear that we have yet to measure the full extent of the threat facing us. While we wait for the Afghan authorities' efforts to produce results, are we just going to sit back and let drug traffickers prosper ? Let them supply markets ? Let them expand markets by tempting new drug users with an abundant supply ? Let organised crime, which is often linked to terrorism, increase its hold on society and governments and gain power through scandalously huge profits ? We must remain in control of the situation. This is one of the great challenges of globalisation.

Western Europe has been the main destination for heroin from Afghanistan. Today, movements of people, goods and funds have intensified greatly in large and increasingly open geopolitical areas, like the European Union and the countries that will join it, but also in countries like the Commonwealth of Independent States, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. Freedom is gaining ground, but



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this change also has unfortunate effects, including an increase in drug addiction in vulnerable populations and the emergence of powerful international criminal groups. As heroin use declined in Western Europe, where it is being replaced by other substances, a new market has been created in the rest of Eurasia, Central Asia and South-East Asia.

International organised crime is growing rich from drug trafficking. It generates terrible corruption. The mafias controlling drug traffic are the same ones trafficking in persons and weapons, and all kinds of other criminal activities. We must act together to ensure that these criminals do not find "grey areas" where they can prosper with impunity as borders are opened up. Today's criminal gangs use the most advanced technology. They turn borders to their advantage, juggle with procedures and work with professionals. We must be vigilant! Their many facets can threaten efforts to build up governments and democracy in new countries. They are worming their way into the core of the world economic system, bringing crime, violence and anarchy. It is our duty to muster our defences against these destabilising forces.

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The drug routes are also the paths of suffering, despair, weakness and disease. How many lives have been destroyed, how many families torn apart, how much potential spoiled when a youth or a child crosses the path of a dealer in death ?

Drug addiction is a public health issue. It threatens the fabric of society by excluding addicts and causes huge health damage; I'm thinking of the ravages of aids, hepatitis and tuberculosis. The fight against drugs must mobilise all health and social bodies at national and international level. There is a terrifying explosion in aids infection through intravenous drug use in some countries. And the countries hit hardest are the ones that do not have necessary means and structures to cope.

Once again, the key words are action and solidarity. None of us can shirk our duty to fight drug production and trafficking from our home front. There are no longer transit countries or consumer countries; there are only victim countries. Producing countries are locked in a vicious cycle. Consumer countries are losing their lifeblood. I hope that this conference will be an opportunity for all the leaders in the fight against drug trafficking and drug addiction to get to know and trust each other. This is the time and place to overcome mistrust and prejudice.

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This balanced and concerted action is aimed at reducing both supply and demand simultaneously, at offering poor countries where drugs are grown sound pathways to development. It is the same action that we adopted five years ago at the UN General Assembly's Special Session on international drug control. This action proved to be well founded in Latin America.



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International cooperation will be successful if it is based on clear and legally sound foundations that all countries accept. The UN has the indisputable legitimacy to be the driving force behind this cooperation.

I would thank Antonio Costa, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which has co-organised this conference. By placing our work within the context of international conventions and under the aegis of the UN, we make it more authoritative. We are giving a new impetus to international cooperation at a time when some may be tempted to give up the fight. Whether we are fighting heroin, cocaine, cannabis or synthetic drugs, the challenges and the measures are the same, and the resources at our command are comparable. Our aim should be to show that our governments are determined to protect our people from the poison of artificial paradises.

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Fifteen years ago, we endeavoured to reduce the transmission of viruses through intravenous drug use. To achieve this, we had to accept some unpalatable truths. At the same time, France undertook a vast programme to provide substitute treatments. It managed to stabilise heroin use and halt the associated spread of viruses.

But, today, France is facing some disturbing trends. Other substances are gaining ground in France, such as cannabis, cocaine and synthetic drugs, like ecstasy. They do even more harm when mixed with prescription drugs and alcohol. Researchers have started to establish a link between cannabis use and the triggering of mental illnesses. The highly disturbing findings of this scientific work spurred us to respond.

The Government is drawing up a new plan to fight drug addiction. The plan is based on two objectives: reducing drug use and preventing addiction on the one hand, and fighting trafficking and supply chains more effectively, on the other.

Reducing drug use and preventing addiction means providing a constant stream of information for our youngest citizens, primarily in our schools, about the dangers they incur. The information must be based on the findings of scientific research, which should give us, day after day, the measure of the impact of drugs on users' health.

I have said that we must pay more attention to drug users, who are victims first and foremost. We must take better care of them. We are constantly trying to improve substitute treatments, which have proven their effectiveness. Above all, we must innovate to find the best solutions for providing health care for regular cannabis users. We must offer help and advice to parents and people working with young people.

This care for the most vulnerable must be backed up by relentless enforcement of the laws against trafficking. And because the law must play a deterrent



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role, and because we believe in the educational virtues of penalties, France will remain firm in its refusal to legalise or depenalise drug use.

The 1970 drug act laid the foundations for this fight, but we now need to assess its implementation. The circumstances have changed over the last three decades. The vast majority of opiate addicts are now being treated by the care system. Now more than ever the priority must be to fight the use of cannabis and synthetic drugs by young people effectively. The choice between prison and mandatory treatment is not always consistent with the seriousness of the offence or to the desire to provide the best care. We need to improve both the care provided to drug addicts and the penalties.

We will wreck the market for drugs by turning young people away from the temptations, by providing new human, material and legal resources for the fight against drug trafficking, through closer cooperation between police and courts and by calling on the international community, as I am doing here, to address this issue collectively.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your conclusions and the links that you will forge here hold out great promise. After your conference, those who are engaged in the fight against drugs and, through them, the leaders of your countries will have a clearer idea of the extent of one of the great threats of the twenty-first century. Everyone will be aware of the need to work together on all fronts, without any topics being off limits or taboo.

This conference will lead to further action. Starting tomorrow, the G8 Foreign Ministers will tackle this issue, followed by the G8 Heads of State and government meeting in Evian. Their work will lead to closer and more effective cooperation. It will provide inspiration for the bodies responsible for coordinating and enhancing international action against drugs.

Once again, I would like to welcome all of you. I hope that your work opens up new and bold avenues, that it provides an opportunity to go beyond mere contacts, to build up trust and cooperation for the benefit of each country, but also for world stability and security. Thank you.

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