



Message from M. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the Republic, to the "AL-RIYADH" newspaper

Paris, 19 July 2006

Addressing the readers of the "Al-Riyadh" newspaper, I would like to begin by expressing to the Saudi people and their leaders my friendship and gratitude for the warm welcome extended to me during the State visit I paid to the Kingdom in March this year, at the invitation of HM King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

The visit to Paris of HRH Crown Prince Sultan ibn Abdul Aziz al-Saud, Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Defence, at my personal invitation, is part of the follow-up to that visit. It is particularly welcome at a time of renewed tension in the region, which is making even more necessary the dialogue between our two countries with their very similar positions.

This visit is also a new milestone in forging the strategic partnership which the late lamented King Fahd and I had decided to develop in order to create long-term relations of solidarity between our two States in every sphere. Indeed, I am happy to see our companies becoming increasingly active in the Kingdom where they have recently achieved some significant successes. I know they are determined to pursue their efforts to contribute to delivering the Kingdom's ambitious programme of development and economic diversification and her Saudification policy (favouring the employment of Saudis). Similarly, I am inviting Saudi investors to come, in greater numbers, to seize the opportunities France is offering them.

This same commitment to our strategic partnership leads us to lend our firm support to the Kingdom in the battle it has, with some outstanding successes, joined against terrorism and to our desire to assist it in maintaining its external security, as regards both military training and cooperation between our armed forces, and modernization of their equipment.

Finally, I should like us to bolster our relations by encouraging our citizens to get to know each other better through increased cultural exchanges and, in particular, by welcoming ever greater numbers of Saudi students to our universities and grandes Écoles (prestigious higher education institutes with competitive entrance examinations).