



## Interview given by Mr. Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic to the Satellite Channel "Al Arabiya".

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QUESTION Mr. President, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview for the Al Arabiya news channel.

LE PRESIDENT I extend the warmest of welcomes to you!

QUESTION Five years on from 11 September 2001, you still favour dialogue among cultures and civilisations. Evidence of which is the Europe -Mediterranean - Gulf States workshop formally opened by you last Wednesday at the Élysée. For some days now we have been witness to polemic on the Pope's remarks on Islam. What in your view should now be done to restore calm?

LE PRESIDENT I believe first of all that we must avoid exacerbating everything that might divide different peoples and, especially, religions. The requirement here is dialogue among cultures and civilisations and therefore of peace.

With regard to the remarks that were made, and on which I have no comment to make, I would simply like to say that it is necessary to take great care not to confuse Islam, which is a great religion both worthy of respect and respected, with radical Islamism, which is a political, and not a religious, attitude. They are two different things and we must be very careful to separate them.

QUESTION Allow me, Mr. President, to raise the situation now prevailing in Southern Lebanon. You were the first to demand an immediate ceasefire and the deployment of an international protection force; that was on 14 July. Your efforts bore fruit in the adoption of Resolution 1701 by the Security Council. UNIFIL has begun to deploy. In your view, what is the next step towards a long-term solution?

LE PRESIDENT Firstly, I was deeply shocked by what Lebanon suffered, the massive destruction that was out of all proportion to the political situation as it could be seen to be. That destruction has left in shock the Lebanese people, with whom, as you know, France has for very many years had a relationship based on esteem and friendship.

I am glad that the United Nations, in a unanimous vote, adopted Resolution 1701, which provides a framework capable, I hope, of enabling peace to develop,



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particularly in Lebanon. In this framework, at the request of the Lebanese government, and in agreement with the Israeli government, a modernised UNIFIL has developed. With France and Europe, which was very important, but also with all the countries of Asia and Russia. The international community emphasised in this way its solidarity, expressing a determination to see peace in Lebanon. It was not only Europe, but the whole of the international community and notably, in the case of Asia, both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, since China was included.

It is my wish that the Lebanese government should be able, after forty years of absence, to impose its presence and its authority on the whole of Lebanese territory, so undeniable is it that no country, no nation can truly exist if part of the territory of that country or that nation escapes the authority of the democratically elected central power. That is therefore essential. It will entail, and this is the next step, an internal agreement within Lebanon to ensure that all political forces can express themselves as such, and participate democratically in the life of the nation, to the exclusion however of armed militias, which are incompatible with a sovereign State.

**QUESTION** The Israeli offensive, which you have just described once again as disproportionate: as you know, whole villages were razed to the ground, or very nearly, entire families, including many children, died under the ruins of their houses - 30,000 homes were destroyed. You spoke last month of the need to hold an international conference for reconstruction. Can you tell us a little more about this initiative?

**LE PRESIDENT** It is certain that Lebanon was shocked and torn apart by this crisis, which has undermined all the efforts made by the Lebanese people in recent years. It justifies action by the international community united in solidarity, action to restore and to reconstruct. A first step has been taken, notably at the instigation of the Swedish Prime Minister, who has gathered together a number of donors to provide aid for the reconstruction of Lebanon. That, I would say, was what was most urgently needed. France was highly supportive of this initiative by the Swedish Prime Minister.

We now need to go into greater depth, which will involve an international conference to allow the resources required to rebuild the whole of Lebanon to be assembled, to support its currency, and to restore its infrastructures and living conditions. I have for this reason proposed that a meeting should be organised and I shall have an opportunity to develop this at the United Nations General Assembly. Where will it be held? Beirut, Paris, or elsewhere, that is not important. What is important is that international solidarity should be expressed in favour of the recovery and reconstruction of Lebanon.

**QUESTION** In any event, France is at the head of a great upsurge of solidarity with the Lebanese people. And it is not possible to talk of reconstruction without mentioning Rafik Hariri, a good friend of yours, now no longer with us. What will be France's position if the report of the investigation commission on his assassination is not conclusive this time?



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**QUESTION** I do not want to anticipate the judicial pronouncement. We in France, and especially myself, as a friend of his, were deeply shocked by the brutal murder of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, who had done so much for his nation, who turned his country around politically, morally and materially. And to whom Lebanon owes homage that is deserved, that is historic.

We were among those who asked for and obtained from the United Nations an investigation commission, which is chaired today by an eminent figure, Judge Brammertz, who will be submitting his report in the near future. Moreover, a procedure that is legitimate, necessary and essential on both moral and political grounds has been set in train for the creation, accepted by the United Nations and which must now quickly be translated into reality, of an international tribunal, to try, if applicable, on the basis of the conclusions of Mr. Brammertz's report, those who instigated the assassination of Rafik Hariri and other assassinations that have occurred, alas, since.

**QUESTION** On another thorny subject, the United States and the European Union are constantly asking the Palestinians to renounce violence. They seem to forget, in doing so, that every day members of the civilian population fall victim to Israeli violence. What is your message, Mr. President, to the two sides today?

**LE PRESIDENT** An imperative message of peace. This conflict has for many years poisoned, one can say, international relations, brings with it numerous consequences, and feeds a terrorism of which we are all aware. There are no other solutions but peace. Naturally, peace presupposes a restoration of the trust that has vanished between Israel and the Palestinians. There was a time when progress was being made towards peace. There were Sadat and Begin, there were Rabin and Arafat; there have been moments when some trust has returned. It must be restored, or nothing will be achieved.

It is our desire that the current situation of Palestine should be taken fully into account, along with its dramatic impact on Palestinians. The fact that nearly one million people are deprived of income because the salaries of civil servants are no longer paid, with all the ensuing human and social consequences; the fact that the Palestinian Authority is deprived of the resources essential to its activity, notably because Israel does not pay what it owes, and specifically the taxes it collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority. There is here an absolute requirement to mobilise, to end the blockade, to implement an initiative for economic recovery to respond to the dramatic situation we are witnessing today in Palestine. It is my strong desire that the French proposal should be taken up: we have proposed that the Quartet should meet as a matter of urgency to prepare an international conference in which the guarantees the international community could give to both sides would be defined, although this does assume that the two sides have resumed dialogue and have together determined arrangements for an agreement.

**QUESTION** A question on the Palestinian government, a government of national unity, that is to be formed in a few days. Do you believe, Mr. President, that



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this step might help break the logjam in the situation in the Palestinian Territories and possibly launch the peace process with Israel?

**LE PRESIDENT** That is my desire, because there is no other possible way out but the search for peace, and that requires trust to be restored, because distrust is a poor counsellor. And that in actual fact is what currently prevails between the two parties. I have every confidence that Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, to whom I express particular homage as President of the Palestinian Authority, can arrive at a solution to allow all concerned to join in a search for peace and stability. Mr. Mahmoud Abbas is in negotiations with the whole of the new majority in Palestine and I hope that the outcome to those efforts will be a government able to resolve the problems, especially those that are material and financial, since they will otherwise result ultimately in a very real humanitarian crisis in the region.

**QUESTION** France often consults with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. On what issues do you share the same points of view?

**LE PRESIDENT** We have a very long-standing and permanent tradition of consultation in friendship and trust with both those countries. With Saudi Arabia, where I have had the opportunity of making an official visit that was genuinely marked by reciprocated friendship and esteem. I also had an opportunity recently to receive a visit from the Crown Prince to Paris.

Similarly, we have a very cordial, very warm, very trusting relationship with Egypt that goes back many years. I was pleased for example at the remarkable address, exceptional in terms of both quality and intelligence, given by Ms Mubarak at the Cultural Workshop held last week in France. I wish to say this here because she left a deep impression!

We have with those countries, and with many others in the region, relations based on trust and friendship. That does not mean that we agree on every detail, but our relations are founded on trust and friendship.

**QUESTION** One last question on Iran, which is still refusing to respond to the proposals by the six world powers. Do you believe that sanctions might lead to positive effects, or do you still prefer a diplomatic solution?

**LE PRESIDENT** It is in my nature always to prefer the diplomatic solution. Iran is a great power which has its rightful place and its rightful role to play in the stability of the region. For many years, Iran has been developing technologies and processes that are, shall I say, open to challenge. The moment had come to reach an agreement, sitting around a table, to find a solution, notably one within the framework of the IAEA. It is in this spirit that firstly the three European countries, that is to say Germany, the United Kingdom and France, and later China, Russia, and the United States, came together to put forward proposals to Iran and engage in dialogue. Those proposals have not yet been accepted, although they are, it seems to me, both reasonable and worthy of confidence. I would like them to lead on to dialogue on an agreement.



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We have at the present time Mr. Solana who speaks in the name of the Six. We have Mr. Larijani, who speaks in the name of Iran, and they are in discussions together. It is my fervent wish that an agreement should be reached, since this is invariably preferable to a clash.

QUESTION Thank you very much, Mr. President of the Republic, for answering all our questions.

LE PRESIDENT I thank you.

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