



Speech by Mr Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic, on the occasion of the decoration of Mr Abraham FOXMAN, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League.

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Elysée Palace, Paris, Monday 16 October 2006.

Mr Director, Dear Abraham Foxman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most pleased to have this opportunity to welcome you here, with your colleagues, your friends and your family. I wish to pay you the tribute worthy of a life's commitment to the service of mutual human understanding, on this earth of ours.

You draw the strength of this commitment from your personal life experience, marked by the tragedy of the Holocaust. You were born into a Jewish family in Poland in 1940. To escape Nazi persecution, your parents sought refuge in Vilnius, Lithuania, where they entrusted you to a Polish Catholic nanny.

And this woman undoubtedly saved your life. For four years, she raised you as a Christian child in a town under German occupation. Yet fourteen members of your family were to perish in the storm. Miraculously, your parents survived and you were reunited with them at the end of the war. They then decided to flee another form of totalitarianism, that of the Soviet Union. They managed to move to the United States in 1950 where they embarked upon a new life.

You attended the Yeshiva of Flatbush in Brooklyn before studying political science, law and economics at university whilst, at the same time, pursuing your studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Following a brilliant academic career, you joined the Anti-Defamation League in 1965. And in 1987, you became the League's National Director and one of the main spokesmen for the American Jewish community.

Throughout your life, you have championed three inseparable causes: the duty to remember, the battle against anti-Semitism and the need for dialogue for peace.

The duty to remember concerns first and foremost remembering the suffering of the Jewish people, the horror of the camps and the criminal collusion. You have actively contributed to this memory, in particular as a member of the Holocaust Memorial Council to the President of the United States. Yet your commitment has also involved perpetuating the memory of those "Just Among the Nations" who



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saved Jewish lives and embodied the universal consciousness.

France faces up to this duty to remember. We have acknowledged the French State's responsibility in the deportation and death of thousands of Jews. We continue to pass on the memory and I would like to mention here the quality of the co-operation established with the Jewish organisations, and the Holocaust Museum in particular.

Your commitment is also against anti-Semitism. Today, hatred of the Other is spreading like a poison through our societies and across borders, fuelled by extremism and images of violence. We must therefore remain vigilant and tirelessly fight these resurgences of the bœte immonde, the heinous beast. You fight this fight with strength and passion. You work in all the arenas and areas where insidious messages circulate, especially the media and the Internet.

This fight is also mine. I know that you have been worried, and rightly so, to see the sharp rise in acts of anti-Semitic committed in France. The French Republic has tackled this issue. It could not tolerate schools and places of worship being degraded or children being threatened because of their faith or beliefs. We have stepped up our legislative arsenal to ensure that each act is prosecuted and properly punished. The results speak for themselves. They encourage us to keep up our watchfulness.

You are also committed to dialogue for peace. As a passionate defender of your cause, you have always advocated dialogue, everywhere and with everyone, to promote tolerance and peace between men. You take part in dialogue between religions and creeds, regularly meeting the Pope, as I believe you just have. You visit the Arab countries. You meet with European leaders, all European leaders, to push forward the fight against anti-Semitism.

And in this regard, I am grateful to you for helping to build a trustful and regular dialogue between France and the American Jewish community. We share the same objectives, in particular as regards Israel: that its existence should be accepted by one and all; the peace process should resume to ensure the existence of two States, Israeli and Palestinian, living side by side in peace and security.

My dear Abraham Foxman, your life and your contribution to peace, to peace amongst men are exceptional. Today, France expresses its esteem and gratitude to you. It is with great pleasure that I bestow on you the insignia of Chevalier in the Legion of Honour.

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