



Speech by Mr. Jacques CHIRAC President of the Republic on the occasion of the opening of the 24th conference of heads of state of Africa and France.

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Cannes, Thursday 15 february 2007

Heads of State,
Madame Chancellor, President of the European Union,
Heads of Government,
Heads of Delegation,
Ladies and gentlemen, my dear friends,

Humanity has entered an age in which the destinies of its peoples are inextricably linked: a new world whose future is inseparable from that of Africa.

Because Africa, the cradle of humanity, is the custodian of a wealth of wisdom and culture that allows us to look upon modernity with different eyes. Africa is synonymous with a demography that is exceptional in terms of both richness and challenge. Africa means vast natural resources that promise development while also arousing greed. It is synonymous with dynamism, thanks to the drive of its peoples, but it also has handicaps inherited from its history. Africa means crises, gaping wounds in the world's flesh from which the international community cannot avert its gaze, for today regional problems often have planet-wide repercussions.

Africa and the world stand at a crossroads. And the important question is this: what is Africa's place in globalisation? There are two ways forward. Either the easy option of short-termism and selfishness will win the day, and Africa can then once again be pillaged, left by the wayside of prosperity, left alone to face its problems. That would represent an enormous risk for the world.

Or alternatively, we can face up to the challenge of development and Africa will take its rightful place in globalisation to become a focus of peace and prosperity.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

We are gathered here because we are convinced that the die is not cast. That Africa has every advantage and every chance for success. Because, aware as we are of the challenges, we also know that everything is possible in this world where no situation is set in concrete and where the tables are constantly being turned.

We are gathered here because France has affection for Africa, feels tied to Africa by bonds of fraternity, history and the heart. Along with, as far as I am personally concerned, a twofold belief: successful globalisation is not possible without a strong and confident Africa. But Africa's efforts will be totally in vain if the world does not support it in its march into the future.

That is why I am particularly pleased to welcome you here in Cannes. Your presence is testimony to the special relationship between France and Africa. It moves me all the more because I have, over many years, built up personal ties with many of you and, as you know, I love and respect Africa.

At our last meeting, the youth of Africa expressed its expectations: President Touré told us of the efforts that were being made to satisfy them and the Bamako review conference demonstrates the success of the enterprise. Other strides forward are in preparation. For what we are seeing is a new Africa, an Africa that legitimately aspires to playing its full role in today's world.

Hardly twenty years ago, more than a dozen outbreaks of crisis were burning across the continent. In several States, undermined by instability, foreign interference challenged the sovereignty of its peoples. Mediation efforts were making only their first faltering steps.

Today, democracy is taking root and so many of these conflicts have been resolved! The commitment of African and international organisations is bearing fruit, for example in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in the Great Lakes Region and also in halting the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea and the conflict in southern Sudan. Very recently, the holding of free elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo set the seal on the reconciliation of a whole nation.

Peace could not have come about without the determined commitment of the African Union to condemn armed coups, to push for dialogue and the holding of valid elections. Its creation has changed things. Its ambitiousness throws new light on the continent's political and economic prospects.

We must also salute NEPAD, which organises, mobilises and defines the priorities. In the years to come, we shall see thousands of kilometres of infrastructures, new dams, and tomorrow, it is my hope, a symbol of the new Africa, the bridge between Kinshasa and Brazzaville.



Thanks to the success of certain States that are making their mark among the emerging countries, the image of an impoverished Africa is not longer a true reflection of reality: average growth on the continent exceeds 5%. With the *Afrique Avenir* meetings, it was my intention to highlight those African successes, the successes of its creators, entrepreneurs, leaders and artists, the continent's mainsprings. They embody a dynamic Africa fully involved in the world's onward march.

African civil society is increasingly organised, and its influence is also growing. It is expecting greater fairness, greater transparency, and greater freedom. An ever-stronger movement is seeking respect for human rights, proper management of public affairs, and solidarity for the most disadvantaged. We must respond to it. Africa is endeavouring to do so. Good financial, social and democratic governance will bring stability to institutions and violence-free development of civil society, without which there can be neither confidence nor growth. Kofi Annan summed it up thus: we will not enjoy development without security, or security without development. But [...] we will not enjoy either without universal respect for human rights .

Backed by the drive and the talents of Africans, Africa is progressing and contributing to the world's forward dynamic. But the continent continues to be faced with substantial challenges: political, ecological, economic and demographic.

Firstly, political. Sadly, the tragedy of Darfur stands as testimony to this. I salute the commitment made by all of you in Addis Ababa. It is to Africa's honour that it refused to accept the inevitability of the humanitarian disaster that threatens the entire region. The international community and the African Union are committed to this. I call upon all the belligerents and the government of Sudan to listen to their voices. To agree to the deployment of a peace force. To cease the attacks, to protect the civilian population and humanitarian workers. To understand that a policy based on the worst possible line of action can lead nowhere but to horror, and therefore to choose the option of reconciliation.

But there are other challenges. The ecological challenge. The environmental crisis is global. Africa is hit harder than others by climate change. It is seeing a worsening of desertification, deforestation and shrinking arable land and fresh water resources. That is why I propose that all African countries should support the setting up of a United Nations Environment Organization. I call upon them to take exemplary steps to protect the irreplaceable ecological riches of which they are the custodians. In that same spirit, France recommends the maintenance of the embargo on the exploitation of the primeval forests of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for as long as its government is unable to exercise full vigilance.



A demographic and economic challenge. Africa may see its population double over the next half-century. Who can fail to understand that at the current rate, Africa will be in no position unaided to guarantee for so many children the education, healthcare, food and employment prospects they have a right to expect?

It is the responsibility of every African country to determine its population policy. But it is the duty of Africa and the world to ensure that they are aware of the issues involved.

The economic choices will be crucial. Africa is rich, but Africans are not. The continent holds one-third of the planet's mineral reserves. It is a treasure trove. But it must be neither pillaged nor sold off cheaply. And for that, the help of the corporations and countries with most demand will be needed. There must be more transparency and we must learn from the experience gained in the Kimberley Process and the EITI initiative, which increasing numbers of Africans support.

An economy must be built that is not excessively dependent on commodities and their volatility by increasing the competitiveness of agricultural and industrial supply chains, and by developing a modern service sector integrated with global networks.

Africa also has its rightful place in the information society: the new technologies are one of the keys that will enable it to become swiftly and fully a part of a globalised world.

And lastly, it is necessary to ensure, and this is a collective responsibility, that Africa's integration into international trade is done fairly. I am thinking particularly of cotton. It is time for the rich nations to cease subsidising their producers to the detriment of those in the Sahel for whom it is their sole source of income. It is time to admit that African countries would be the first to lose from the Doha Round if we set out to remove the advantages enjoyed by the least developed countries.

Dear friends,

For France, Africa will never be just one partner among others. For twelve years, I have insisted that France, while loyally shouldering its own historical heritage, should assist the changes occurring on the continent in a new spirit. The intention was to rebuild the ties between us in a relationship oriented towards the future, and to broaden them to encompass the continent as whole in order to take account of global issues.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

All French cooperation programmes, whether civil or military, have been overhauled. With a single key idea in mind: partnership. And with two imperatives: stability and solidarity.

France abides by, and will continue to abide by the defence agreements that bind it to several African countries. Where Africa and the international community request it to do so, France will continue to meet its responsibilities to the full. Whether the aim is to prevent crisis or to address conflict, France will act within the legitimate framework of UN or African mandates, as has been the case in recent years in Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

Stability also means ensuring that territorial integrity is preserved: this is a core principle for France. We are for this reason providing our support to Chad and to the Central African Republic, which are threatened by the dangers arising from Darfur. In the same spirit, in 2003 we conducted, along with European Union contingents, a stabilisation operation in eastern Congo.

But experience teaches us that the stability of any State is dependent above all on a democratic calendar and free and fair elections. Crisis often springs from dubious polls that undermine the legitimacy of the newly elected. The rule of law must be reinforced. We support the strong convictions of the African Union in this regard. It is this spirit that informs our action in Côte d'Ivoire, a country I would wish to see back on the road to wisdom and development which made it an example for all under the wise leadership of President Houphouët-Boigny.

Our second objective is solidarity. At a time when Africa is becoming a fully-fledged actor in globalisation, there can be no question of slackening our efforts. France has doubled its aid to Africa over the last four years. In our bilateral aid, which will rise still further to meet the target of 0.7% of GDP by 2012, Africa's share will still be over two-thirds.

And in accordance with the commitment I gave in Bamako, we shall further emphasise France's openness to African youth, and especially students. I am pleased to see that there are over 110,000 now following our higher education courses.

Additional to France's direct commitment is its mobilisation in favour of Africa in international organisations. Perceptions are changing. Africa is beginning to attract interest, to be courted even. I am happy to see this, because I have been fighting for years for greater attention to be paid to Africa. From the HIPC Initiative on debt at the Lyon G8 in 1996 to the setting up of the Global Fund to fight AIDS in Genoa in 2000, and not forgetting the invitation to African leaders to participate at Kananaskis, Evian and Gleneagles, how far we have come! Africa is now high on international agendas. I thank Ms Merkel for keeping it there at the next G8 in Germany.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

I also welcome a stronger commitment on the part of the European Union, with strong support from France, which decided as long ago as 1995 to contribute almost one quarter of the 9th EDF in order to maintain the growth in aid for Africa. A commitment that the German Presidency of the European Union has recently confirmed. A promise that is to be translated into reality by the holding of the long-deferred Africa-Europe Summit in Portugal this year.

At the Millennium Summit, solemn undertakings were made in favour of Africa. Noting that the budgets of the developed nations would never be enough to finance those undertakings, three years ago I initiated studies for innovative financing mechanisms. They have now borne their first fruit with the solidarity levy on air tickets and UNITAID. This is a commonsense solution, and one with a future. But it is simply an experiment. It must be developed and applied to other objectives such as water, forest management, and education for all. Alongside you, France and Europe will fight these great battles for the world's future.

My dear friends,

As you know, I love Africa, its regions, its peoples, its cultures. I fully appreciate its needs, I understand its aspirations. I know that it holds extraordinary energy in its heart. I have confidence in its future because I am convinced that a new Africa is on the way. May our Cannes Summit show the world that it must now reckon with Africa.

Thank you.

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