

**Speech by Mr Jacques Chirac President of the Republic to the opening session of the  
22nd Conference of heads of State of Africa and France, Paris**

**February 20, 2003**

Majesties, Presidents, Heads of Delegation, Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ladies and Gentlemen, For thirty years now, the Conference of Heads of State of Africa and France has set the tone and served as inspiration for a special relationship rooted in mutual esteem and friendship, and in shared interests and feelings.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Paris, whose privilege it is to play host to you once more. It gives me great satisfaction to see once again those who are familiar to these gatherings! And for those Heads of State joining us for the first time, I want to assure you of our delight in numbering you among us.

Please allow me also, on behalf of all of us, to express my gratitude to United Nations Secretary-General Mr. Kofi Annan, and to the Interim Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr. Amara Essy, who are both honouring us with their presence and who will be enlightening our proceedings.

Africa occupies a singular position in the world. It is the birthplace and origin of humanity. With its age-old cultures steeped in mingled influences, it is the repository of a rich human experience with few parallels. Having overcome the immense ordeals imposed upon it, it is a powerful source of wisdom. It has suffered invasion, pillage and maltreatment, yet it has resisted. It has won back its independence and asserted its dignity in the concert of nations.

Despite poverty and harsh climates, it is endowed with abundant natural resources and is served by peoples endowed with exceptional talent. It is now within its power to break out of the cycle of poverty and under-development. Already the voices of Africa, its rhythms and emotions, its vision of the world are enriching western culture, inspiring our artists and captivating our youth. Its business enterprises are inventing original models and proving themselves capable of taking their rightful place in the modern economy. That is why I have faith in Africa.

But, even as it seeks to pursue its development, it is suffering the full brunt of the turbulence and tragedies of our times, and the uncertainties of global growth. Like everyone else, Africa is eager to grasp the opportunities afforded by globalisation. We know she has the capacities. Together, we want to help her to achieve this.

The task is immense, a priority for our time. In working to accomplish it, our gathering will inspire hope – on condition that, together, we trust in the solid foundations of dialogue, solidarity and partnership.

Dialogue, first. France is listened to throughout the world because she listens to others, because she is willing to listen to you. History has bequeathed us a legacy of close proximity, and political, economic and human relations unequalled in their intensity. The ensuing respect and mutual understanding are the bedrock of and a source of enrichment for dialogue between us. Today, through you, peoples will once again give voice to their hopes and aspirations, to their ambitions. Together, we will seek ways to ensure those calls are heard, ways to convert them into initiatives, reforms and common projects.

For solidarity is our great cause. It is a paradox that we live in a world where the gap between rich and poor widens daily, yet it is one in which there could be abundance for all. We refuse to accept that this is inevitable. It is unthinkable, on moral grounds, that hundreds of millions of men and women should be excluded from progress and hope. In any case, this runs the risk of posing a grave threat to peace for nations and to the stability of the world.

Finally, the central theme of our Summit: partnership. This supplies us with one of the keys previously lacking in order to give full weight to our co-operative ventures and make them fully effective. The time has come to share responsibility. The world has welcomed the commitment of Africa's leaders in favour of the principles that underpin the peace and prosperity of peoples everywhere, namely democracy, good governance, an open economy, and respect for sovereignty. A web of convergent actions is emerging through the NEPAD approach, creating the conditions for fulfilment of the ambitions we all nourish for Africa – an Africa at peace and prosperous, whose youth and elan will impart fresh dynamism to the world.

I see in this partnership an occasion to renew France's commitment to stand alongside the peoples of Africa, and to reaffirm solemnly the community of destiny, which binds us and which creates obligations for us.

This is a matter for Governments. But it also reflects the feelings of ordinary people. The French people know the debt they owe to Africa, for Africa has so often stood with us in the camp of freedom against totalitarianism. They know, too, all that Africa contributes to France in the form of support, solidarity, and intimate ties between our peoples. In a global society so sensitive to relationships of power, let us work to combine our respective influences more effectively in the service of the great causes of the contemporary world.

Africa lies at the heart of France's priorities. For me, the choice speaks for itself, for it reflects the very principles that preside over our diplomacy, namely promoting peace and security, strengthening solidarity, fostering exchanges of people and goods, and inter-cultural dialogue. But it also corresponds to our duty to remember the great wounds of the past, whose scars still remain. Finally, it is imposed upon us by present times. Contemporary events oblige us to respond to new disasters, among them the great pandemics and the fate of refugees and displaced persons. You – and we – cannot give legitimacy to the use of violence; we cannot allow grey zones or areas of lawlessness to emerge; we cannot leave provinces to become disinherited. How can we remain indifferent to the grave famine now threatening 40 million Africans? Here too, the answer lies in determined action.

I am especially resolved to reiterate our determination since some of you have formed the impression France was tending to distance itself from Africa. The French Government has taken steps to rectify this.

In the financial sphere first of all, by transcending immediate constraints. Our official development assistance will increase by half between now and 2007, rising to 0.5 per cent of our GDP. Our goal is to raise this to 0.7 per cent by 2012. Africa, already the prime beneficiary of our aid, will receive more than half of this new flow.

In the political sphere, France has undertaken to respond to situations of open crisis, sometimes endangering the stability of whole regions. Hence we have provided substantial logistics and funding in support of the peace processes set in motion by the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (CEMAC) Heads of State, or in West Africa by those of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). I want to pay homage to them here.

Given the urgency and seriousness of the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, we had no choice but to deploy a sizeable interposition force pending the arrival of a regional force. We all know that this force, to which ECOMOG elements have since been added, has saved thousands of lives. Today, a basis for national reconciliation has been laid, thanks to the efforts of all the mediators involved, starting with those of ECOWAS. It is now up to all Ivorians, and in particular their representatives, to work with determination and in good faith to revive a society at peace with itself once more. Theirs is a huge responsibility, for the risk of a split remains. I call upon each of them to respect their undertakings.

I am glad to say that France is not alone in pleading on Africa's behalf. I salute here the resolute action of Mr. Kofi Annan, who used his authority and energy to the full in keeping this continent at the heart of the United Nations' concerns. I pay tribute to all those who have committed themselves to an African renaissance through the creation of the African Union and the launch of NEPAD.

These combined efforts have sparked a new dynamic. Africa's appeals have won a better hearing in the major world gatherings. They have been translated into the ambitious goals set by the Millennium Conference, as well as in Monterrey, where a 25 per cent increase in official development assistance was decided, half of it for Africa. Similarly, the adoption in Kananaskis of a plan to provide support for NEPAD and the cry of alarm raised in Johannesburg are both evidence of the increased attention now being paid to your continent.

The broad lines for the way ahead have thus been charted. Now we must resolutely commit ourselves to them. Actions must be made more visible and of direct benefit to populations. We must ensure the industrialised countries adopt them wholeheartedly. That is the priority of France for the G8 Summit in Evian.

Here, in Paris, I propose that we confirm the terms of our new partnership. We will focus on its political dimension. What are the bases and goals of relations between Africa and its partners? How can these be redefined? How can we make sure they are relevant? How to ensure that this partnership is not just a governmental affair but comes to be one for the people at large?

Some answers to these questions have been found already, and we have all signed up to certain principles. The Ouagadougou Summit in 1998 adopted the principles of good governance – the rules and behaviours that govern societies at peace with themselves, where the State guarantees public freedoms and the general interest. In Paris, in 2000, we recommended the use of conflict prevention and settlement procedures. At our last meeting, in Yaoundé, we discussed ways for Africa to secure its rightful place in the process of globalisation.

But it is from Africa itself that we have had the clearest, most resolute expression of the political foundations of this new partnership, in the shape of NEPAD. Africa's leaders themselves have articulated these values, principles and behaviours which are essential in order to create a firm basis for civil peace, development and progress. This is no mere statement of principle, for you have been careful to institute a collegiate mechanism to enforce respect for it. By taking matters in hand in this way, they will greatly enhance the credibility of the commitments made.

And it was about time too: for grave crises now challenge us in countries hitherto spared such troubles. Aside from their dramatic effects on populations and economies, they are harmful to Africa as a whole. They give ammunition to those who doubt the continent's progress. They obscure the results achieved in ending the conflicts in the Great Lakes region, between the countries in the Horn of Africa, and in Sierra Leone. I salute all those who are tirelessly working to reconstruct peace there, unassumingly using the "strength of the sap" to repair the "havoc of the typhoon".

True, factors of instability remain. That is why it is important to strengthen the authority of the State, establish civilian security forces, and guarantee the integrity of elections. It is essential to build a sense of national unity transcending sectional or community interests. We must instil in youth a "culture of peace" and employ its enthusiasm in the service of development.

Similarly, the response to endemic evils such as arms trafficking, illicit trade, the looting of resources and rebellions led by adventurers, must be organised around clear and recognised principles.

The first of these is the unswerving condemnation of the illegal seizure of power, in whatever form. The OAU instituted this rule at its summit in Algiers. That has been the unvarying position of France.

The successful hand-over of power in a number of countries shows this to be the right way forward. To deviate from it is to deny all value in the fundamental mechanisms underpinning the rules of democracy. It is equally important to shun attempts by parties to conflicts to outdo each other in terms of violence, favouring dialogue instead. Political dialogue disarms violence, whereas a riposte would exacerbate it. Violence must be denounced wherever it comes from. Those who perpetrate it now risk punishment at the hands of the International Criminal Court who extends its protection to all citizens worldwide. The days of impunity or when people were able to justify the use of force are over. Now we must work to strengthen justice.

But we all agree that the fundamental issue is still development. It is the one on which all else depends: security, confidence, peace and human happiness. It therefore occupies a special place in relations between Africa and its partners. We should endeavour, during the course of our proceedings, to establish immediate priorities for NEPAD, starting with key sectors demanding special attention, namely social development, water, and agricultural development.

Social development is about defeating HIV/Aids thanks to the weapons now available to us. And not a moment too soon, for it is wreaking ever wider havoc. It is also about meeting basic needs such as education and health for all. It is about ensuring the place of women, and protecting children and the vulnerable. It is about building the future.

Access to water for city dwellers and rural populations, protecting water resources, and sanitation are all major challenges for the coming decades. In Africa, some 400 million people, or nearly one person in two, are virtually without drinking water. This scarcity is a cause of deepening poverty, of countless diseases and grave social inequalities. It also carries the seeds of ecological catastrophe for the continent. Each State and region must frame a strategy for achieving the Millennium objectives laid down in Johannesburg. This calls for substantial financial resources. We are going to have to display a capacity for innovation, developing public-private partnerships to harness the funds required for large-scale long-term capital projects.

Agricultural development has been neglected for too long, even though it is imperative if we are to produce sufficient food for all, drag rural populations out of poverty and boost export earnings. This is an issue dear to my heart, and tomorrow I will be making precise proposals to you on this, which we could then discuss.

I would like the developed countries to redesign their food aid and agricultural export support policies so as to avoid destabilising Africa's food production. I would like to see favourable trade terms extended to Africa, along the lines already being implemented by Europe. Finally, I believe it is important to re-open the neglected issue of raw materials, which is crucial to the development of many countries.

Official assistance has a decisive role to play in supporting development. But I must emphasise the role of the private sector. NEPAD has grasped this clearly: in our present century, neither African States nor Africa's partner States will be the sole drivers of development however determined they may be. It is private investors who create wealth and growth. So our role is to build confidence. We must attract to Africa the energies and talents that bold development projects demand. We must create secure economic and legal environment for business enterprises. This means overhauling legal codes, such as those already adopted within the framework for Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (OHBLA), and calls for recognised legal institutions and stable economic rules. That way, your businessmen and women will invest, hire, and commit themselves to new projects. International investors will find their way back to your continent. And the resulting gain in dynamism in Africa will embody the renaissance you are seeking to bring about.

My dear friends,

Please allow me to conclude with a reference to the great questions presently troubling the world. Whether it be the fight against terrorism or against organised crime, dealing with the great pandemics, or the question of sustainable development, Africa faces the same challenges as every other continent. We expect Africa to leave its stamp on the upheavals caused by globalisation. Africa must add its voice to the responses now in gestation. Africa must strive to act and be present, relentlessly, in all of the forums in which our common future is being shaped.

Globalisation is not just an economic and financial phenomenon. It should also be a humanist, ethical and cultural process. It should be the organising spirit behind the dialogue between different peoples and cultures. Africa must hold high its values, namely the spirit of solidarity, creativity, and the diversity of cultures and heritages. If there is a continent whose vocation is to give globalisation a human face, it is surely Africa. Together, with Europe, let us set about shaping a world that is not only efficient, but also composite and inspired.

That is the ambition of our 22nd Summit.

Thank you.