

72nd United Nations General Assembly – Syria/Sahel/migration/North Korea/climate – Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic

New York, 19 September 2017

United Nations Secretary-General,

Heads of state and government,

FRANCE'S VALUES

It is a privilege to be speaking here before you today and I know who I owe that to. I owe it to all those who, a little over 70 years ago, rose up against a barbaric regime which seized my country, France. I owe it to the nations who heard the cry of these resistance fighters and who sent their children, from America, Africa, Oceania and Asia, to French shores to help. They did not all know what France was, but they knew that defeat for France also meant the defeat of the ideals that they shared, that they were proud of and for which they were willing to die. They knew that their freedom and their values depended on the freedom of other men and women living thousands of kilometres from them.

I owe it to those who, when the war was over, dared to reconcile and rebuild a new international order. To those who, like René Cassin, understood that human rights were at the heart of international legitimacy. To those who judged the guilty, picked up the victims, righted the wrongs, to those who wanted to believe that the values that the war violated needed to be restored, values of tolerance, freedom, humanity which are the foundations of the United Nations. Not because these values were good, but because they were fair and allowed the worst scenarios to be avoided.

I am not saying this because I merely want to talk to you about history, but because when I hear many of our colleagues talking about the world today, they somewhat forget this history that we come from, which now seems exotic or so far from us, so far from our immediate interests, but maybe determines and will determine our lives more than anything.

Ladies and gentlemen, while my country holds a somewhat unique position within the order of nations, this gives it a debt, a debt to all those that have had their voices taken from them. And I know that France's duty is to speak for those that we do not hear. Because to speak for them is also to speak for us, today and tomorrow. And today, it is these forgotten voices that I wish to bring to you.

SYRIA

I listened to Bana, a citizen of Aleppo, and it is her voice that I wish to bring to you here. She has lived in the terror of bombings, police and militias, she has known refugee camps. The Syrian people have suffered enough: it is time for the international community to take note of its collective failure and question its methods.

To establish a lasting and just peace, we must urgently concentrate on the political resolution of the crisis, through transition, as the Security Council unanimously decided in Resolution 2254 in 2015. France, together with its partners, has taken the initiative and is

supporting the United Nations' efforts to finally initiate an inclusive political road map in Syria. This is why I hope that we can launch a contact group with all permanent Security Council members and all stakeholders. Today, the "Astana" format may prove useful, but it will not suffice. And these last few days have highlighted many difficulties.

We need to equip ourselves with the real means to kick-start negotiations, because the long-term solution will be political and not military. It is in the interest of us all and, first and foremost of course, that of the Syrian people.

In this context, I have set out our two red lines. Firstly, absolute intransigence on the use of chemical weapons. Those responsible for the attack of 4 April this year must be brought before the international justice system, and it must never happen again.

Secondly, the absolute necessity to allow everyone access to treatment, to allow medical structures and protect the civilian populations. France decided to make this one of the priorities for its presidency of the Security Council next month.

Working for peace in Syria means taking action on behalf of the Syrian people but also protecting ourselves from Islamist terrorism, because in Syria and Iraq, our biggest battle is against terrorism. We are acting on behalf of all those who have died in the attacks over the last months – because jihadist terrorism has hit our fellow citizens on every continent, regardless of their religion. We must therefore all protect ourselves by joining forces, and our security becomes the first priority. This is what France is trying to achieve with its initiatives to tackle the use of the Internet by terrorists and fight all their sources of funding.

This is why I wanted to organize a conference in 2018 on this fight during which I will call upon you all to make a commitment. But this is also why France is taking military action within the coalition in Syria and Iraq, within the rule of international law. This fight against terrorism is a military fight, a diplomatic fight but also an educational, cultural and moral fight. We are fighting through our work in the Middle East and Africa, but also in Asia, and we should all unite behind it.

TERRORISM AND THE SAHEL

I listened to Ousmane, a schoolboy in Gao, and it is his voice that I wish to bring to you here. He is living his childhood in Mali in dread of indiscriminate attacks. And yet his only dream is to go to school without risking death. In the Sahel, we are all now committed: the United Nations, the countries of the region within MINUSMA and the G5 joint force, the European Union and its member states, and I would like to pay tribute here to all these players and underline that it is a particularly painful fight which has a high cost in human lives.

Our challenge today is to eradicate terrorism, and to achieve this, strengthen national capabilities so that states themselves can look after their own security. Regardless of the resources we use, we cannot succeed in our shared mission if the countries most concerned cannot assume their own responsibilities. This is why, since taking office, I have supported the deployment of the G5 Sahel joint force and I am now calling for your collective mobilization.

This is also why I want to dedicate myself to boosting support for African peace operations, because they hold the key to the future. We must collectively rethink the

relationship between peacekeeping, regional organizations and host countries. And our ability to meet populations' aspirations for peace depends on this.

Undoubtedly, a military response can never be the only response, and I would like today to insist on the necessity of a political response. I am thinking, of course, of the implementation of the Algiers Agreement and our development policy.

MIGRATION

I also listened to Kouamé, and it is his voice that I wish to bring to you here. Forcefully displaced, he crossed Africa before putting his fate into the hands of traffickers in Libya. He crossed the Mediterranean, arrived safely while many others perished at sea. Refugees, displaced people, and those we sadly call "migrants" have in reality become a symbol of our times. The symbol of a world where no barrier can stop the march of despair, if we do not transform routes of necessity into routes of freedom.

These migrations are political, climatic, ethnic; these are all routes of necessity. Necessity now means escape, in the face of the persecution to which the Rohingya are falling victim. Over 400,000 refugees, of whom the majority are children. Military operations must stop, humanitarian access must be guaranteed, and law and order must be restored in the face of what is, we know, ethnic cleansing. France will take the initiative in the Security Council on this subject.

Necessity means fleeing to save one's family when war is raging and international humanitarian law is no longer respected, but instrumentalized, as in the strategy of violence used in Syria; exile, when the defenders of freedom are the first targets of the powers that be. Protecting refugees is a moral and political obligation in which France has decided to play its part. By supporting the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees wherever it must intervene, by opening the legal means for resettlement as close as possible to the conflict zones, in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey but also in Niger and Chad, and by defending the right to asylum and absolute respect of the Geneva Convention.

In Paris, on 28 August this year, we brought together the African and European countries the most directly concerned by migration flows on the Central Mediterranean route. We adopted a road map with the priority of combating traffickers who trade in human misery. We must put an end to the unacceptable violations of fundamental rights by establishing a humanitarian infrastructure with the UNHCR and the IOM, helping countries of origin and transit to better control the flows.

But although in the face of terrorism and migration, short-term responses are needed to manage the crises, it is our political will to address the root causes of all of these instabilities that today comes into play. These migration problems, this terrorism, are political challenges above all, which are deeply rooted, for all of us, because it is through genuine development policy that we will be able to address moral and civilizational root causes.

DEVELOPMENT

That is why I have decided that France will fulfil its role in setting a goal of earmarking 0.55% of our national income to official development assistance within the next five years.

I thank you for your applause, but please let me put this into perspective. First because I know some people expect more and that it is never enough and that France today is not doing enough; but especially because the point is not so much the money. It is the efficacy of this money. It is what we decide to do with it. It is about making better assessments, being better responsible for this money that all of us are contributing.

So, yes, I would like to see France contribute sufficient amounts of official development assistance but I would above all like to see more innovation, more intelligence, different methods used and more responsibility on the ground when it comes to this assistance; that is what I would like, along with you. The challenge today is for this official development assistance to arrive on the ground simply, efficiently, having been assessed, and to the destination that was initially sought; that is what we wanted to do, for example, with the Alliance for the Sahel that we launched with the European Union, the World Bank and UNDP.

And then, it is important to have clear priorities, the first being to invest in education because it is with education that we will win this fight against obscurantism, into which countries, entire regions, both in Africa and the Middle East, are plunging. And here today, I am calling on the international community to do what needs to be done in Dakar in February 2018 to replenish the global partnership for education that France will co-chair with Senegal. It is a vital battle the we will fight there, it is about enabling young girls and boys not to fall victim to obscurantism, to be able to choose their future, not the future that is forced upon them by need or the one that we choose for them here in this hall.

The second priority is to invest in health, in the fight to eradicate major pandemics and malnutrition, because there is no hope when people cannot be trained or treated. In this fight for development we also need to support the role of women, culture and freedom of expression. Everywhere that the role of women is being challenged, flouted, development is being obstructed, which means the capacity of a society to become emancipated, to occupy its rightful place, is being obstructed; these are not trivial societal issues, it is a deep civilizational fight, it is our fight, they are our values and they are not relative, they are extremely universal on every continent, all over the world. Everywhere that culture is flouted, there again our collective ability to take up these challenges is limited.

That is why UNESCO is today a particularly vital institutions and in this regard has a key role to play, which is to conserve a human face in the world when so much obscurantism seeks to eliminate its incredible diversity. It is so that culture and the language of everyone can live and flourish that we are fighting to see progress of the human mind continue. And freedom of expression is a battle that is also extremely topical. The United Nations is tasked with protecting the freedom of those who think, reflect, express themselves and particularly the freedom of the press. That is why I am calling for the appointment of a special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for the protection of journalists around the world, because under no circumstances can the fight against terrorism, the toughening of the world in which we live, justify the reduction of this freedom.

CLIMATE CHANGE

I would lastly like to speak on behalf of Jules, my fellow French citizen living on the island of St Martin; I am thinking of his destroyed house, of his fear that it will happen over and over again because climate change multiplies disasters. The future of the world is that of

our planet, which is taking its revenge on the folly of men; nature is calling us back into line and is summoning us to take up our duty of humanity and solidarity. Nature will not negotiate, it is up to humanity to defend itself by protecting it. Climate disruptions destroy traditional opposition between the North and the South, the most vulnerable are always the first victims caught up in the whirlwind of injustices, and we are all affected by the terrible runaway climate episodes from China to the Caribbean and from Russia to the Horn of Africa.

My country promised before this Assembly a universal agreement in Paris, which was achieved and signed in this hall. This agreement will not be renegotiated, it unites us, it brings us together; to unravel it would be to destroy a pact that was made not only between states but also between generations. It can be improved with new contributions, but we will not go back. I profoundly respect the decision of the United States and the door will always be open to them, but we will continue with all governments, local governments, cities, companies, NGOs and citizens of the world to implement the Paris Agreement. On our side, we have the strength of pioneers, endurance, certitude and the energy of those who would like to build a better world and, yes, this better world will create innovation, jobs, whether the men and women whose vision of the future is based on looking back like it or not.

We will build it immediately by implementing our contributions, as France has done by adopting its climate plan, which places it on the road to carbon neutrality, by convening in Paris on 12 December all those who have decided to advance on the basis of concrete solutions, by mobilizing public and private financing, and I confirm here that France will do its part by allocating €5 billion a year to climate action from now until 2020. We will increase our ambitions by presenting this afternoon a Global Pact for the Environment whose aim will be to forge international law for the century to come with the support of UN bodies. When some would like to stop, we must continue to move forward, to go further, because climate change is not stopping, because our disruptions are not stopping and because our duty of solidarity and humanity is not stopping.

Ladies and gentlemen, behind each of our decisions there are voices and lives, there is the invisible parade of those we must defend, because one day we were defended ourselves. Why do we not hear these voices more, these voices that call out? Why are we no longer capable of doing what, 70 years ago, restored all mankind's ability to believe in itself, global responsibility, the taste for mutual assistance and faith in progress? And yes, when I talk about Bana, Ousmane, Kouamé or Jules, I am speaking about my fellow citizens, your fellow citizens, every single one of them, for our interests and our security are also theirs! We are inextricably bound together in a community of destinies, for today and tomorrow. So global balances have, of course, profoundly changed in recent years. The world has once again become multipolar, meaning that we need to relearn both the complexity of dialogue and its fruitfulness.

LIBYA/VENEZUELA/UKRAINE

Our collective action is confronted with the instability of states, such as in Libya. Six years on now from its armed intervention, before this assembly I hereby accept France's particular responsibility to ensure the country's stability is restored. The meeting at La Celle-Saint-Cloud on 25 July enabled progress on the reconciliation which is essential for the success of the political process under the auspices of the United Nations. Alongside the Secretary-General and his Special Representative, we need to achieve, in 2018, the organization of elections that will mark the beginning of an effective restoration of the state,

and I'll put all my energy into this. In Venezuela too, collective action needs to uphold respect for democracy and respect for all political forces, and cede no ground to the dictatorial tendencies that are currently at work. And in Ukraine, we need to work tirelessly to enforce the commitments that have been made and enable an effective ceasefire, and gradually, as we are doing with Germany in particular, enable the parties present to comply with international law and bring an end to this conflict.

NORTH KOREA

Multilateralism is struggling to address the challenges of nuclear proliferation, isn't managing to banish threats that we thought were a thing of the past and that have erupted suddenly once more in our present. Pyongyang, for example, has breached – and assumed – a major threshold in military escalation. The threat concerns us all, immediately, existentially and collectively. To date, North Korea has shown no sign of a will to negotiate. Its leaders have locked themselves into determined one-upmanship, and it is our responsibility, along with all our partners including China and Russia, to firmly bring them back to the table to negotiate a political settlement to the crisis. France will refuse any escalation and will close no door to dialogue, so long as the conditions are there for this dialogue to further peace.

IRAN

That same objective is why I am defending the nuclear agreement with Iran. Our commitment to nuclear non-proliferation enabled us to achieve a solid, robust and verifiable agreement on 14 July 2015, which will enable us to ensure Iran does not acquire nuclear weapons. Terminating it today, without anything to replace it, would be a grave mistake. Not respecting it would be irresponsible, because it is a useful agreement that is essential to peace, at a time when the risk of an infernal spiral cannot be ruled out. That is what I said yesterday to the United States and to Iran.

For my part, I would like us to supplement this agreement with work that will help control Iran's ballistic activities, and to govern the situation after 2025 which is not covered by the 2015 agreement. We need to be more demanding, but we should in no way unpick what previous agreements have secured. Look at the situation we are in today. Have we, through a lack of dialogue, better contained the situation in North Korea? Not for a single second. Wherever there is dialogue and control, multilateralism has powerful weapons and is useful. That is what I want for us all.

MULTILATERALISM

So, I don't know if my distant successor, in 70 years, will have the privilege of speaking before you. Will multilateralism survive the period of doubts and dangers that we are experiencing? In truth, we need to remember the state of the world, 70 years ago, broken by war and stunned by genocides. We need to rediscover today the optimism, ambition and courage that we raised against these reasons to doubt. We need to rediscover faith in what unites us. That means that we need to rediscover confidence in these founding values of the UN, which are universal and protect individuals across the planet, guaranteeing their dignity.

But, ladies and gentlemen, how did this happen? Because we allowed the notion to descend, that multilateralism is, in a way, a comfortable sport, a game for sitting diplomats; that it is the instrument of the weak. That is what has happened over so many years. Because

we let ourselves believe that we were more credible, stronger, when we acted unilaterally. But that is wrong. Because we let ourselves believe, sometimes cynically, that not everything could be achieved through multilateralism.

So we let global disruption gain the upper hand. We have dragged our feet on addressing climate change and on tackling today's inequalities that dysfunctional capitalism has begun producing. We have allowed discordant voices to speak out. But it is always the loudest voice that wins at that game, every time. In our complacency, forgetting the lessons of our history, we have allowed the idea that we are stronger outside multilateralism to gain a foothold.

But the challenge today, for our generation, is to rebuild that multilateralism. It is to explain that today, in the current state of the world, there is nothing more effective than multilateralism. Why? Because all our challenges are global, such as terrorism, migration, global warming and regulation of the digital sector. All these issues can only be addressed globally, and multilaterally. Each time we consent to circumvent multilateralism, we hand victory to the law of the strongest.

Because yes, my friends, if we are to enshrine our vision of the world, we can only do that through multilateralism. Because this vision is universal. It is not regional. Because every time we have given in to those who say that the role of women was a matter for the few, in a certain part of the world, but not for others, or that equality between citizens was a matter for one civilization, but not another, we have abandoned what has brought us here together in this place and the universality of these values. There too, in certain countries, we have given in to the law of the strongest.

Because every time the great powers, sitting around the table at the Security Council, have given in to the law of the strongest, to unilateralism, or denounced agreements they had themselves signed, they have not respected the cement of multilateralism: the rule of law. That is what made us, and builds peace over time.

So yes, today more than ever, we need multilateralism. Not because this is a comfortable word, or because it is a sort of refuge for smart people. No, because multilateralism is the rule of law. It is exchange between peoples, the equality between us all. It is what allows us to build peace and address each of the challenges we face.

UN REFORM

So yes, to do this, the United Nations has total legitimacy to act and preserve the world's stability. That is why I want a more accountable, effective and agile UN, and I fully support the UN Secretary-General's plan, his ambition and determination to lead an organization equal to the world's challenges. We need to step out of our offices, of meetings between states and governments, to seek other energies and to represent differently the world as it is, taking a second look at the dogmas in which we sometimes allow ourselves to be trapped.

We need a Security Council capable of making effective decisions and that is not locked up through the veto, when mass atrocities are committed. We need a better representation of all forces present on all continents. We need coordination in the management of crises, with

the European Union, the African Union, and sub-regional organizations that are key players. That is why France will be there, alongside the United Nations, for the ongoing reform.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say that the forgotten voices that I have mentioned today resonate only in a forum like this one: a forum where everyone has their place, where everyone can be heard, even by those who do not want to listen. For the latter, I have a message: not listening to the voices of the oppressed, of victims, means allowing their misfortune to grow and develop until the day it strikes us all. It means forgetting that we have all, at a moment in our history, been the oppressed, and that others have heard our voices. It means forgetting that our security is their security, that their lives affect ours and that we have no chance of coming out unscathed when the world is in flames.

Not listening to those who appeal for our help means believing that we are protected by walls and borders. But it is not our walls that protect us. It is our will to act, and to influence the course of history. It is our refusal to accept that history will be written without us, while we believe we are safe. What protects us is our sovereignty and the sovereign exercise of our strength in support of progress. That is the independence of nations in the context of our interdependence.

Not listening to these voices means believing that their misery is not our own. That we will forever possess the goods that they can only dream of. But when that good is the planet, when it is peace, justice or freedom, do you think we can enjoy it alone, and apart?

If we do not stand up for these common goods, we will all be wiped out. We are allowing fires to break out into which, tomorrow, history will throw our own children.

Yes, today even more than before, our common goods are also our interests and our security, and their security too. There cannot be, on the one hand, the irenicism of those who believe in the rule of law and multilateralism and, on the other, the pragmatism of certain unilateralists. That is false.

Our real effectiveness is at play in this conflict, here. So, with you, I believe today in a strong and responsible multilateralism. That is the responsibility of our generation, if we are not to give in to fatalism. We need only one form of courage, ladies and gentlemen: that of hearing these voices, that of not deviating from the trace we need to leave in history, and that, at all times, of considering that we have to reconcile our interests and values, our security and the planet's common goods. Our generation has no choice, for it has to speak for today and for tomorrow.

Thank you./.