

Speech by the President of the French Republic in Addis Ababa on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the creation of the African Union

25 May 2013

Madam Chairperson of the African Union Commission,

Heads of State and Government,

Allow me to thank the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Mr Hailemariam, most sincerely for his invitation, because it is an honour for France to be invited here to Addis Ababa for the 50th anniversary of the creation of the African Union.

I am struck by how this important event has been able to bring together and unite the countries of Africa, which had been colonised for decades and which have not only been restored to independence but to their full dignity and capacity for action in the African Union. In 50 years, Africa has made great progress. Its decolonisation is now complete. It has defeated apartheid – my thoughts go out to Nelson Mandela.

Africa has become democratic, even if there is still progress to be made and violations of human rights are no less unacceptable. Africa has developed even if the progress achieved has not been sufficient to eradicate poverty. So, my African friends, you can be proud of the road travelled over the last 50 years.

But I am here today to talk to you about the future, the future of Africa, the future of the relationship between France, Europe and Africa, and therefore the future of the world. Together, we need to address three challenges:

The first is security: security for the people, security for development and security for peace.

Today, terrorism, trafficking and piracy are not just matters of concern for Africa but for the entire world. It is together that we must combat these scourges. That is what we are doing in Mali to protect the Sahel, and France has, alongside its friends in West Africa, shouldered its responsibilities, as Ethiopia did when it intervened in Somalia, along with the countries of the African Union.

In each case, the aim has been to combat terrorism.

France is fully aligned with the orientations defined by the African Union. France considers that Africans themselves must ensure the security of Africa. But France is ready to work with Africans to reinforce capabilities for action, to equip African armed forces with the means to respond to all forms of aggression.

And I would like to take advantage of my presence here at this event, this ceremony, to invite the Heads of State of Africa to Paris on 6-7 December next for a “summit for peace and security in Africa”. Together, we shall define the best forms of cooperation to prevent and to address conflicts and to fight terrorism everywhere.

The second challenge we must meet is development.

Africa is, of this I am aware, a continent with a future, growing strongly, achieving exceptional success and at the same time with needs that are still substantial in terms of infrastructure, education, town planning and agriculture. France is also ready to contribute with funding to everything that can help the development of projects for Africa.

France is also willing to substantially open up its market with the European Union, which is doing a lot and which can do even more with better terms for access for African products in Europe under the terms of an economic partnership agreement which must be exceptional in character.

France also wants Africa to enjoy a greater role and responsibility in international financial institutions, in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Africa must be involved at the highest level in those institutions. Similarly, Africa must be a major actor in global governance, and France supports the idea of Africa's presence as a permanent member on the Security Council through its organisation.

The third challenge we also face is the environment, it is sustainable development, it is the fight against global warming, it is the combat undertaken by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, whose memory I salute. That is the combat we must pursue, because we can see very worrying signs with desertification, the deteriorating condition of land, the misuse of water and local populations without access to this essential resource.

We are also worried by the damage done to biodiversity and the destruction of animals which are unique to Africa.

It is for all these reasons that in 2015, France intends to host the Climate Change Conference in order to fight against greenhouse gas emissions and the disasters they cause.

Without hesitation, France undertakes to devote a significant portion of the resources derived from the financial transaction tax to serve development and the fight against global warming.

That is also why at Rio+20 last year I expressed a wish for the creation of a World Environment Organisation to be established in Nairobi as a clear illustration of the world's responsibility to Africa and Africa's role in combatting damage to the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

France is intimately linked to your continent by its history, by the responsibilities it bears, and because of the human ties we have established over many decades.

I have not forgotten that part of France's population is of African origin and is following the events today because it has hopes of a deeper relationship between Africa and France.

Our economy is turned towards Africa and we have shared interests.

Nor have I forgotten the role played by the French language in our relations, although it has never been my wish to turn the Francophonie into a relationship with Africa. The Francophonie is at the disposal of Africa. The French language is a tool for diversity and cultural exception and you do us a great honour when you speak it.

To sum up, France wants to see the African Union play its full role on the international stage, to see Africa develop and to see an Africa which is surer of both its present and its future

And that is why France now says, with all possible solemnity and all the friendship between us: "Long live the African Union".