

Introductory address by Mr. Jacques CHIRAC President of the Republic at the International Conference on Support for Lebanon

Paris, Thursday 25 January 2007

Your Highnesses,
Mr. Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Presidents,
Prime Ministers,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Dear friends of Lebanon,

We are gathered here today, bound by a duty of friendship and solidarity towards a country that bears a very old civilization and carries a very powerful message. A country where the din of war has never managed to stifle the dialogue of cultures. A country that is obstinately seeking rebirth and more than ever needs the unanimous support of the international community.

I wish to thank each and every one of you for having responded to our invitation, by coming here – in some cases from very far away. I am personally very moved by the solidarity you have demonstrated for the Lebanese people as a whole by attending this meeting. I am sure that all Lebanese citizens share this feeling of gratitude.

As a land at the crossroads of civilizations, a land that all too often has fallen victim to regional conflict, last summer Lebanon once again experienced appalling clashes that plunged the country into mourning and destruction.

Those dramatic events recalled the imperative necessity for the Lebanese State to assert to the full its authority over the whole of its territory, as is fitting for any sovereign, independent State. They also emphasized the necessity of finding a lasting solution to the problems that led to this inconceivably violent crisis. In this respect, Security Council resolution 1701, which made it possible to halt the fighting, offers a framework to solve them.

Since that time, genuine breakthroughs have been achieved. The legitimate Lebanese government and the forces supporting it, put in place by democratic elections, have taken up the challenge and made courageous efforts, in particular in deploying the army in the southern part of the country. And I salute here the courage and effectiveness of the Lebanese military.

Certainly, much remains to be done. The implementation of resolution 1701 entails compliance with the embargo on illicit weapons by all States, especially those in the region. It also entails a cessation of the violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, its airspace in particular.

But we must look beyond that. In close coordination with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, whom I salute, and whom I am pleased to see take part in this conference, it is time to address the application of all aspects of resolution 1701. For this reason, we must arrive at a settlement of the Chebaa Farms issue, a crucial problem from many points of view, and the freeing of captured soldiers.

In this regard, and I am pleased to note this, the action taken by the international community is resolute and coherent. The deployment, with the agreement of all parties, of a UNIFIL that has been transformed in terms of both manning and resources, gives the full measure of its determination. I add that all the Security Council resolutions concerning Lebanon, without exception, are aimed at helping this country recover to its full sovereignty. They must be applied.

But international solidarity must also be expressed in aid for Lebanon to meet its economic and social challenges.

Dear friends, if we are gathered here today, it is in order to reaffirm our commitment to supporting Lebanon in its efforts to meet, over the long term, the challenges of reconstruction.

Last August, at the close of the conflict, the Stockholm Conference made possible a mobilization of effort to meet the most urgent needs. I wish to salute the commitment of Sweden that made this generous and necessary initiative possible.

Today, the goal must be to give Lebanon, over the longer term, every possibility of modernizing itself. In close conjunction with the Lebanese government, whose efforts we must support, and with decisive backing from Saudi Arabia and the United States, I therefore proposed to call this international conference. It carries on directly from the Paris I and Paris II conferences, of which Rafik HARIRI was the instigator and architect and to whom I wish to pay solemn homage today in the name of all of us.

Mr. President of the Council, as Minister of Finance, you were closely associated in 2002 with the efforts undertaken by President Rafik HARIRI to bring about the recovery of your country. Today, the responsibility of continuing his work is yours.

The reform program prepared and adopted by your government on 4 January last meets those requirements. Its ambition is to reconstruct, to reinvigorate economic activity, to control public deficits and to reduce the State's burden of debt. Monetary stability, as desired by Rafik HARIRI and of which governor Riad SALAMEH is the vigilant and respected guarantor, is an essential condition to be met to win the confidence of the financial community. It is, along with the sectoral and social reforms, a roadmap that is both ambitious and realistic, and whose high quality has been underlined by the international experts who met here in this very place a fortnight ago. That program will enable the emigration of the young to be halted, new opportunities to be created and the country's economy to be modernized.

It is the view of all concerned that substantial and immediate financial support from the international community is indispensable to assist in those efforts. Such aid is particularly crucial given the prospect of an International Monetary Fund program for Lebanon.

We also know that financial stability is essential for Lebanon's political stability. In this regard, sustained and credible control of public debt, which has reached more than 180% of national wealth following the hostilities of last summer, is an absolute necessity.

In this spirit, France will play its full part in that effort. It will provide, as it did in 2002, a significant level of assistance in the form of a loan of €500 million on very favorable terms, more than half of which will be paid out this year in accordance with the program

presented by the Lebanese government, in order to meet Lebanon's need for finance for 2007. I recall here Lebanon's capacity, never belied in the past, to meet its commitments. Concerned to respond in the best way possible to the needs of all Lebanese citizens, France intends to mobilize its resources, in close conjunction with government of Lebanon, concomitantly with the implementation of the economic and social reforms.

Dear friends, we are all aware of the difficulties facing Lebanon today. It is of course true that it is first and foremost the responsibility of the Lebanese to enter into constructive dialogue among themselves and to unite to overcome those difficulties. France, like all friends of the Land of the Cedar, has never ceased to work to assist the Lebanese, all Lebanese, in finding a way forward to unity in the national interest. The action of all responsible actors, especially in the region, must be in this direction.

However, we all know that the stability of Lebanon is of decisive importance for the stability of the region as a whole. The conference that has brought us together is intended for all Lebanese citizens and its ambition is focused on the long term. It is for this reason a crucial milestone, a unique opportunity, emphatically to reaffirm our wish to see a united Lebanon, working together as a sovereign nation respectful of all components of its population.

Your participation, in terms of both the diversity of the delegations, and the level of representation, sends out in this respect a very strong signal to Lebanon and about the stability of the region. For that I thank you and I already see in this a very substantial outcome achieved by our meeting.

I shall now hand over to Mr. SINIORA to allow him to set out the main lines of the Government's courageous plan and the structural reforms aimed at modernizing the economy and containing the budget deficit. He will also describe for us the steps taken by the Governor of the Bank of Lebanon, specifically the policy of the Central Bank and the contribution of the Lebanese financial community.

I shall then ask the various participants to make known their feelings, beginning with the representatives of the principal international institutions, foremost among which is Mr. BAN Ki-moon, whom I

salute once again, and thank for the honor he does France by making this his first international visit as Secretary-General of the United Nations.