

11 November 2018 - [Seul le prononcé fait foi](#)

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# Speech by Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic (Arc de Triomphe, Paris - November 11, 2018)

On November 7, 1918, when Bugle Corporal Pierre Sellier sounded the first ceasefire at around 10 a.m., many soldiers couldn't believe it; they then emerged slowly from their positions while, in the distance, the same bugle calls repeated the ceasefire and then the notes of the Last Post, before church bells spread the news throughout the country.

On November 11, 1918, at 11 a.m., 100 years ago to the day and the hour, in Paris and throughout France, the bugles sounded and the bells of every church rang out.

It was the Armistice.

It was the end of four long and terrible years of deadly fighting. And yet the Armistice didn't mean peace. And in the east, for several years, appalling wars continued.

Here, that same day, the French and their allies celebrated their victory. They had fought for their homelands and for freedom. To that end, they had agreed to every sacrifice and every kind of suffering. They had experienced a hell that no one can imagine.

We should take a moment to remember that huge procession of soldiers from metropolitan France and the empire, legionnaires and Garibaldians, and foreigners who had come from all over the world because, for them, France represented everything decent in the world.

Alongside the shadows of Peugeot, the first soldier to fall, and Trébuchon, the last to die for France 10 minutes before the Armistice, they include the primary schoolteacher Kléber Dupuy who defended Duaumont, Apollinaire, Blaise Cendrars in the Marching Regiment of the Foreign Legion, soldiers from the Basque, Breton and Marseille regiments, Captain de Gaulle, whom nobody knew then, Julien Green the American at the door of his ambulance, Montherlant and Giono, Charles Péguy and Alain Fournier who fell in the first weeks, and Joseph Kessel who had come from Orenburg in Russia.

And all the others, all the others who are ours, or rather to whom we belong and whose names we can read on every monument, from the sunny mountains of Corsica to the Alpine valleys, from Sologne to the Vosges, from the Pointe du Raz to the Spanish border. Yes, a single France, rural and urban, middle-class, aristocratic and working-class, of all hues, where priests and anti-clericals suffered side by side and whose heroism and pain made us what we are.

During those four years, Europe very nearly committed suicide. Mankind was plunged into a hideous maze of ruthless battles, a hell that swallowed up every soldier, whatever side they were on and whatever their nationality.

From the next day, the day after the Armistice, the grim count began of the dead, the wounded, the maimed and the missing. Here in France, but also in each country, families waited in vain for months, for the return of a father, a brother, a husband, a fiancé, and those missing people also included the admirable women who worked alongside the soldiers.

Ten million dead.

Six million wounded and maimed.

Three million widows.

Six million orphans.

Millions of civilian victims.

A million shells fired on French soil alone.

The world discovered the scale of the wounds concealed by the fervor of fighting. The tears of the dying were replaced by those of the survivors, because the whole world had come to fight on French soil. Young men from every province and from overseas France, young men from Africa, the Pacific, the Americas and Asia came to

die far from their families, in villages whose names they didn't even know.

The millions of witnesses from every nation recounted the horror of the fighting, the stench of the trenches, the desolation of the battlefields, the cries of the wounded in the night, and the destruction of lush landscapes until all that remained were the charred silhouettes of trees. Many of those who returned had lost their youth, their ideals, the joy of living. Many were disfigured, blind, amputated. For a long time, winners and losers mourned equally.

1918 was 100 years ago. It seems far away. And yet it was only yesterday!

I've traveled the length and breadth of French lands where the harshest battles took place. In my country I've seen the still grey and sterile earth of the battlefields! I've seen the destroyed villages which had no more inhabitants to rebuild them and which now only bear witness, stone by stone, to the folly of man!

I've seen on our monuments the litany of Frenchmen's names alongside the names of foreigners who died under the French sun; I've seen where the bodies of our soldiers lie buried beneath a landscape that has become innocent again, just as I've seen where, jumbled together in mass graves, lie the bones of German and French soldiers who, one freezing winter, killed one another for a few meters of ground...

The traces of that war have never been erased in the lands of France, in those of Europe and the Middle East, or in the memories of people throughout the world.

Let's remember! Let's not forget! Because the memory of those sacrifices encourages us to be worthy of those who died for us, so that we could live in freedom!

Let's remember: let's take away none of the purity, the idealism, the higher principles that existed in the patriotism of our elders. In those dark hours, that vision of France as a generous nation, of France as a project, of France promoting universal values, was the exact opposite of the egotism of a people who look after only their interests, because patriotism is the exact opposite of nationalism: nationalism is a betrayal of it. In saying "our interests first and who cares about the rest!" you wipe out what's most valuable about a nation, what brings it alive, what leads it to greatness and what is most important: its moral values.

Let us – the other French people – remember what Clemenceau proclaimed on the day of victory, 100 years ago to the day, from the National Assembly rostrum, before the Marseillaise rang out in an unparalleled chorus: France, which fought for what is right and for freedom, would always and forever be a soldier of ideals.

It's those values and those virtues that sustained the people we're honoring today, those who sacrificed themselves in the fighting to which the nation and democracy had committed them. It's those values, those virtues that made them strong, because they guided their hearts.

The lesson of the Great War cannot be that of resentment by one people against others, any more than it can be to forget the past. It's a rootedness that forces us to think about the future and what is essential.

From 1918 onwards, our predecessors tried to build peace, invented the first forms of international cooperation, dismantled empires, recognized many nations and redrafted borders; they even dreamed then of a political Europe.

But humiliation, the spirit of revenge and the economic and moral crisis fueled the rise of nationalism and totalitarianism. Twenty years later, war came once again to devastate the paths of peace.

Here today, peoples of the whole world, see just how many of your leaders are gathered on this sacred slab, the burial place of our Unknown Soldier, the poilu [First World War infantryman] who is the anonymous symbol of all those who die for their homeland!

Each of those peoples carries in its wake a long cohort of fighters and martyrs who emerged from it. Each of them is the face of that hope for which a whole young generation agreed to die: that of a world finally peaceful again, a world where friendship between peoples prevails over warlike passions, a world where the spirit of reconciliation prevails over the temptation of cynicism, where bodies and forums enable yesterday's enemies to engage in dialogue and make it the binding force for understanding, the guarantee of a harmony that is finally possible.

On our continent, such is the friendship forged between Germany and France and the desire to build a foundation of shared ambitions. Such is the European Union, a freely agreed union never seen in history, delivering us from our civil wars. Such is the United Nations Organization, the guarantor of a spirit of cooperation to defend common goods in a world whose destiny is inextricably linked and which has learned the

lessons of the painful failures of both the League of Nations and the Treaty of Versailles.

It's this certainty that the worst is never inevitable when men and women of goodwill exist. Let's tirelessly, unashamedly, fearlessly be those men and women of goodwill!

I know, the old demons are reappearing, ready to do their work of spreading chaos and death. New ideologies are manipulating religions and advocating a contagious obscurantism. At times, history threatens to resume its tragic course and jeopardize the peace we've inherited and which we thought we had secured for good with the blood of our ancestors.

So let this anniversary day be one on which there is a renewed sense of eternal loyalty to our dead! Let's again take the United Nations' oath to place peace higher than anything, because we know its price, we know its weight, we know its demands!

We political leaders must all, here, on this November 11, 2018, reaffirm to our peoples the genuine, huge responsibility we have of passing on to our children the world previous generations dreamed about.

Let's combine our hopes instead of pitting our fears against each other! Together, we can keep at bay these threats – global warming, poverty, hunger, disease, inequality and ignorance. We've begun this battle and can win it: let's continue with it, because victory is possible!

Together we can break with the new "treason of the intellectuals" which is at work and fuels untruths, accepts the injustice consuming our peoples and sustains extremes and present-day obscurantism.

Together we can bring about the extraordinary flourishing of science, the arts, trade, education and medicine, which I can see the beginnings of throughout the world, because our world is – if we want it to be – at the dawn of a new era, a civilization taking man's ambitions and faculties to the highest level.

Ruining this hope because of a fascination with self-absorption, violence and domination would be a mistake which future generations would rightly make us historically responsible for. Here, today, let us face with dignity how we are judged in the future.

France knows what it owes its soldiers and every soldier from all over the world. It respects their greatness.

France respectfully and solemnly pays tribute to the dead of other nations it once fought. It stands at their side.

"It is in vain that our feet detach themselves from the soil that holds the dead", wrote Guillaume Apollinaire.

On the graves where they are buried, may the certainty flourish that a better world is possible if we want it, decide it, build it and will it with all our heart.

Today, on November 11, 2018, 100 years after a massacre whose scar is still visible on the face of the world, I thank you for this gathering which renews the fraternity of November 11, 1918.

May this gathering not last just one day. This fraternity, my friends, actually calls on us to wage the only battle worth waging: the battle for peace, the battle for a better world.

Long live peace between peoples and states!

Long live the free nations of the world!

Long live the friendship between peoples!

Long live France!