

16 July 2017 - Seul le prononcé fait foi

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Speech by the President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron at the Vel d'Hiv commemoration

Prime Minister of Israel, dear Bibi, thank you for what you have said.
Members of the Government,
President of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions in France,
President of the association of the Sons and Daughters of Jewish Deportees from France,
President of the Union of Auschwitz Deportees,
President of the Foundation for Holocaust Remembrance,
President of the French Committee of Yad Vashem,
Chief Rabbis,
Mayor of Paris,
Members of Parliament,
Prefects,
Representatives of the diplomatic corps,
Elected representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am here with you today on this dark and solemn occasion to perpetuate the guiding thread initiated in 1995 by Jacques Chirac, to whom I would like to pay particular tribute today, and maintained by Dominique de Villepin in 2005, Nicolas Sarkozy and François Fillon in 2007 and, lastly, continued by François Hollande in 2012.

Just recently, what we considered to be established by the authorities of the French Republic across party lines, proven by all historians and confirmed by the national conscience, was contested by French political leaders prepared to trample on the truth. Responding to these counterfeiters is to do them too much honour, but to leave them unanswered would be worse, making us accomplices.

So yes, I will say this here: it is France that organized the round-up, subsequent deportation and, consequently, for almost all of them, the death of the 13,152 French Jews dragged from their homes on 16 and 17 July 1942. More than 8,000 were taken to the Vel d'Hiv before being deported to Auschwitz. Among them were 4,115 children aged between 2 and 16 years, whose memory we are today honouring most particularly and for whom I would like us to observe a minute's silence.

(All stand and observe a minute's silence)

Thank you.

I condemn all the tricks and subtleties of those who claim today that Vichy was not France, as Vichy, of course, did not represent all French people, as you have recalled, but it was France's government and administration.

The crimes of 16 and 17 July 1942 were the work of the French police, obeying the orders of the Government of Pierre Laval, the General Commissioner for Jewish Affairs, Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, and of Prefect René Bousquet.

Not a single German took part.

I also condemn those who practice relativism, explaining that exonerating France from responsibility for the Vel d'Hiv round-up would be a good thing. And that would mean following in the footsteps of General de Gaulle and François Mitterrand who never said a word about this subject. But there are truths that can be bridled by the state of society with trauma still raw for some, while others remained in denial.

The stark tears in French society meant that appeasement and reconciliation prevailed over the truth. Our societies thus allow themselves respite during which the work of remembrance remains underground, during which people recover their strength and reconcile little by little to rebuild, before finding the words of truth that will genuinely heal them. And before finding the collective courage to face mistakes and crimes.

That is why we are not here to judge the decision made by these two Heads of State, both of whom were actors of the Second World War and its complexities. But we also need to remember that it is François Mitterrand who established this day of remembrance, and that during all these years the underground combat of so many people went on, to ensure that nothing was forgotten.

And then time did its work.

Witnesses and survivors spoke, archives opened, historians worked. Society ripens tragedies and grief. And then the truth emerges; it is implacable, irrevocable. No-one can escape it. Hiding or belittling it is an insult to our collective memory.

By acknowledging its faults, France has opened the way to repairing them. That is to its honour. That is the sign of a strong nation that can face its past. That is the courage of a people not afraid to examine its conscience and reach out to the victims and their children. Reaching out and reforming ties does not mean humiliating ourselves through some sort of repentance. It is standing tall and being strong.

I know that there are those who will say that days like today, and words like those that I just pronounced are a reminder of the humiliations of our country, and that it is an indecent repentance. None of that is true. This is an essential act of remembrance and history, it is our responsibility, our responsibility to completely reconcile our people, even in the darkest pages of our history, so that everyone can at last find their place.

Knowing where we failed, who failed, also means remembering with greater pride those who said 'no', and those who reached out to their fellow people in humility and humanity.

So yes, today, we are also thinking of those who were already, in 1942, engaged in France's internal and external resistance, and who paid for their clandestine combat with their lives.

They were a great harvest of heroes that saved France and its honour. We are also remembering all those French people who offered persecuted Jews a welcoming refuge and a safe hiding place, enabling three quarters of France's Jews not to suffer the terrible end of those seized on 16 July. We are remembering all those Righteous with pride, that pride that has since become part of our national pride as a whole.

But in parallel to all these heroes, there was Vichy, the French State. For the France represented by the French State did not replace the France of the Third Republic overnight. Ministers, officials, civil servants, economic leaders, managers and professors of the Third Republic provided the majority of Field Marshal Pétain's personnel. Then everyone set out on their path towards active or passive obedience, or to Resistance.

That the Vichy Government could count on the country's forces to conduct its policy of collaboration is a fact. The idea that Vichy was a mere parenthesis, opened in 1940 and closed in 1945 supports the high idea that some have of France.

It is easy to view Vichy as a monstrosity that grew out of nothing and returned to nothingness, to believe that these people came out of nowhere and received just punishment at the liberation that eliminated them from the national community.

It is easy, so easy... but it is wrong.

And no pride can be built on a lie.

I am going to tell you why it is important not to feed this idea, why we must always remember that the French State of Pétain and Laval was not just an unpredictable aberration born of exceptional circumstances.

Because Vichy and its doctrine unleashed the vices that were already a stain on the Third Republic: racism and anti-Semitism.

Today, I want these two words, that are sometimes bandied around to resonate with all their force. I want us to hear loud and clear the abomination and misery that they bear, for these children whose names and ages we just saw written on the wall of the Memorial Garden of the Vel d'Hiv Children were victims of nothing other than racism and anti-Semitism.

Racism because their parents were foreign when they, themselves, were mostly French.

Anti-Semitism because they were rounded up as Jews.

The suffering of these children whose faces Serge Klarsfeld – whom I would like to once again thank most solemnly – has patiently brought together in a book that cannot be read without tears and unspeakable disgust, is the suffering not only of your children, my dear Serge, but of our children.

The suffering of these children, from when they were dragged from their families, from their arrival in this immense boiler that was the Vel d'Hiv where, for several days, they had nothing to share but distress, without food and without water until the fire brigade Captain Pierret – later nominated Righteous Among the Nations – insisted that it was provided;

From the moment when they were deported to transit camps, distraught, from that day and that moment of total pain when they were separated from their parents, because Pierre Laval wanted whole families to be captured together, but not to travel together;

Until they were loaded into sealed waggons for an apocalyptic journey, bringing them upon their arrival to cries, unanswered calls, blows, screams, the driest, darkest solitude and a death of obscene violence, before their lifeless bodies – children's bodies – were humiliated in oven and ashes;

This suffering – their suffering – beggars belief and cannot be put into words. It began here, in the morning on 16 July 1942, because in France, in the consciences of French citizens, French political leaders, French officials and French journalists, anti-Semitism and racism had insidiously, slowly sown their seed, making the disgraceful tolerable and even evident, making it a State policy: the policy of collaboration.

That, all that, is what made such an absolute atrocity possible.

Yet neither racism nor anti-Semitism were born with the Vichy regime. They were there, alive and present under the Third Republic. The Dreyfus affair showed their virulence. The 1930s gave them new momentum through the emergence of intellectuals, parties and newspapers that made them their doctrine.

It is the France of the weekly *Je suis partout* and the book *Bagatelles pour un massacre*, the France where Louis Darquier de Pellepoix – him already – could proclaim with impunity in 1937: "We need to resolve the Jewish problem urgently, either by expulsion or by massacre". It is the France where anti-Semitism metastasized in the elite and in society, insidiously preparing minds for the worst.

Because yes, my friends, barbarism does not advance in the open. It does not wear a uniform. And when the Nazi boots marched on Paris streets, it was already too late.

Barbarism forms first and foremost in people's minds. Ideas and words gradually break down barriers in our consciences, break down civilization, and accustom us to listening to and accepting words that we should not even hear.

Hitler was not primarily the Third Reich. He was not 1933. First and foremost, Hitler was *Mein Kampf*. Vichy was not the starting point for anything and it was France's weakness that let the cancer spread. But Vichy was not the end of anything either.

I know that we all make a point of fighting anything that could lead to the same situation. But we must open our eyes and look reality in the face. In today's France, the corruption of minds and moral and intellectual weakness that racism and anti-Semitism represent are still present, and notably so. They take new shapes, new faces and choose more surreptitious wording.

You only need to stop for a moment, however, to see, behind the new façade, the racism of old, the entrenched vein of anti-Semitism.

Ordinary racism abounds with words and caricatures. It closes the doors to jobs for young people stigmatised for their name or surname. Global conflicts can be found within the borders of our Republic, creating divides which hound young Jews from certain schools or force immigrant families to withdraw into their own communities.

And then one day, because we kept quiet, because we did not wish to see, words become actions. It is then that words – which for some were just hate articulated differently, and for others were a form of cowardice or unwillingness to open their eyes – are transformed into lives cut short and actions that kill.

Ilan Halimi, Jonathan Sandler and his two sons Arie and Gabriel, Myriam Monsonego, Yohan Cohen, Philippe Braham, François-Michel Saada, Yoav Hattab paid with their lives. As did Brahim Bouarram. And Father Hamel. And despite her murderer's denials, justice must now uphold the whole truth on the true reason for Sarah Halimi's death.

Every desecrated or vandalised synagogue, mosque, church, temple, cemetery must be a warning to us

Every accusation of vandalism by mosque, church, temple, cemetery, must be a warning to us.

Worldwide conspiracy theories, delusions about global finance, insidious iconography, identity crises bringing out the most toxic of clichés are all spreading at great speed and are reaching gullible or porous minds.

Racism and anti-Semitism have unprecedented means of propaganda at their disposal to carry out their insidious work. Social networks are the great purveyors of such propaganda and we are yet to understand the scope of their influence. Our magistrates and law enforcement agencies must be better trained in this matter.

So yes, we are indeed fighting, fighting thanks to your indispensable work to uncover the bright trace of the martyrs, their names, surnames, ages, addresses, everything that provides a link, no matter how tenuous, between these shattered lives and our reality, reminding us that barbarity happens here, on the street corner.

What the Klarsfelds have achieved towards this over decades is crucial and deserves our deep-held gratitude.

We are fighting, we are fighting by refusing to allow abject remarks which debase people's minds to go unpunished.

We are fighting to ensure that the perpetrators do not win. In 1978, L'Express found Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, the same as ever, exiled in Spain. As if still possessed by an anti-Semitic demon, he showed now regret for his zealous work in favour of deportation. He even maintained that lice were the only things gassed at Auschwitz. He was, however, confronted, at a time when silence was largely upheld, by the intransigent and unsurpassed voice of Simone Veil, breaking the near silence that she had observed on the topic until that moment. That same year, Serge Klarsfeld published his "Memorial to the Jews Deported from France".

Such actions are invaluable at a time when the vile monster is coming out of the shadows. Simone Veil's work, her outcries and fundamental fights, have now come to an end. As she closed her eyes one last time, she knew that her voice would continue to be heard through her son, Pierre-François, who, for the last two years, has chaired the French Committee of Yad Vashem.

But we are wrong in saying this, their voices will never die. They will never die because we have decided to keep them alive, and we have decided once and for all that these voices, voices which some did not wish to hear for so many decades, will never cover up the baseless comments nor the guilty silence. Their voices will never die.

These voices also belonged to Samuel Pizar, who left us in 2015, and Elie Wiesel and Jean-Raphaël Hirsch, who both passed away in 2016. Today, my thoughts also turn to Hani Malberg who narrowly escaped the raid and who passed away only three days ago.

In our world where religious wars are reappearing, where ethnic conflicts are being rekindled, where intolerance and sectarianism are joining forces, we must do all we can to ensure humankind does not accept to fall so low.

How valuable, then, are the examples set by those deported who, in the camps, plunged into abject misery, haunted by the shadow of death, lifted themselves beyond the survival instincts their captors wished to reduce them to, to treat, nourish and clothe their unfortunate companions and sometimes even paint and draw like Léon Delarbre or Boris Taslitzky, to keep a diary like Etty Hillesum, to compose quartets or operas like Germaine Tillion and with them the only documentation of their memory of conferences on Proust, Michelangelo and natural sciences.

Some say that it was all invented to keep themselves alive, but this was not the case. They had understood that they had been denied was not simply life, fading little by little to a slow death, but their humanity, our humanity. And that every day, despite their emaciated, exhausted state, they defended our civilisation, our history, our artists, a language or philosophy, and in so doing they refused to give an inch to this civilisation, because what was at stake was not survival, it was a full, complete life, it was the defence in each of these places of the humanity that every one of those individuals in that moment truly embodied. This shall never be forgotten.

We, today, have only one task: be worthy of what these people did in the time of deepest darkness, worthy of this inner humanity that they showed when everything was done precisely to kill their humanity. Every day, every minute, we must be worthy, like the Holocaust survivors whose example gives us so much. Because our Republic is indeed this project of a humanity which is constantly being reinvented, searching for the best of itself through inclusion, through culture, through education.

Chasing away the shadows of racism and anti-Semitism requires us to be unfaltering, to never settle for a Republic that is content to merely oversee proceedings, to never have other believe that accepting certain statements would be good for the unity of the country, we would be tantamount to letting the wounds heal over. Never give an inch to this humanity, give nothing because every time it calls the humanity of each individual

into question.

Because every nation runs the risk of sleepwalking and accepting the unacceptable by habit, by apathy.

We must never allow economic constraints to let us give up on the places which give rise to the worst abuses. We must never compromise on education, we must never compromise on transmission, we must never compromise on culture, we must never compromise on the fight against obscurantism and ignorance. We must tirelessly support those who work on the ground.

We must never compromise on what unites us, all the projects which live up to the humanity that our time offers us: bringing democracy to life, helping the destitute, seizing the global ambition to fight climate change, provide the best possible welcome for refugees forced to flee from war... because all these causes, all of them make us better people.

This battle is also that that we are fighting, and that we will continue to fight everywhere, together, Prime Minister, against dark terrorism and the worst forms of fanaticism, against all those who want us to forget what I just recalled.

So yes, we will cede no ground to messages of hate and we will cede no ground to anti-Zionism, for it is a mere reinvention of anti-Semitism. And we will cede no ground to all those who, on all continents, seek to make us give up freedom, seek to recreate division, seek to make us abandon our humanity, our democracy and our Republic.

My friends, we must not lose sight of the very vocation of our country, uniting all citizens and giving everyone their place, their dignity and their meaning. For that is the best means we have to oppose the powerful dissolving force of racist and anti-Semitic hate. It is from the absence of hope and the feeling of purposelessness and neglect that are born the fears and hatreds that arise between us. We must combat all these hatreds based on who we are, where we come from and what we believe.

And we must not allow ourselves to be convinced by the prophets of woe who spend their time telling us that the horizon is dark, that hope is vain, and that France is running out of time – and has perhaps already disappeared, that it has become accustomed to this violence and division, and who pick scapegoats. For they are also, in these words and ideas, the sources of despair and discord. The Republic stands strong because it is capable of protecting all its children, the Republic stands strong because it can look its whole past in the face, and the Republic stands strong because it does not give up – and will never give up – anything of what makes it what it is or any of its values. The Republic stands strong because we will always prefer the “vigilant dream” of the poet Éluard.

The children of the Vel d’Hiv would have loved to go to the school of the Republic, to obtain certificates, find a trade, found a family, and to read and go to shows. They would have loved to learn and travel. And their parents would have loved to see them grow up, and grow old together. They would all have wanted to love and be loved. We have given them back names, ages and addresses.

I want to say to these children that France has not forgotten them. I want to say that France loves them. I want to say that France will do everything possible so that their suffering is a constant counsel not to give in to hatred, bitterness or despair.

My children, we will build a France where you would have wanted to live.

My children, we will build a France where you will always live.

Long live the Republic, long live France.