

Speech by the President of the French Republic at the podium of the United Nations during the High-level International Conference for Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and Implementation of the Two-State Solution.

President of the General Assembly,
Secretary-General,
Heads of State and Government,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are here because the time has come. The time has come for release of the 48 hostages held by Hamas. The time has come to stop the war, the bombardment of Gaza, the massacres and the flight of civilians. The time has come, because emergency is everywhere. The time has come for peace, because in an instant it may be beyond our grasp. That is why we are gathered here today. Some will say it is too late, others will say it is too soon. One thing is certain : we can no longer wait.

In 1947, this Assembly decided to divide Palestine, then under a mandate, into two States : one Jewish and the other Arab, thereby recognizing the right of both groups to self-determination. In so doing, the international community consecrated the State of Israel, finally fulfilling the destiny of a people who, after thousands of years of wandering and persecution, were finally able to establish a great democracy there. The promise of an Arab state, however, remains unfulfilled to this day.

Since then, Israelis and Palestinians have travelled down a long road of hope mixed with despair, each in their own way. And we have travelled down it with them, each of us according to our own history and sensibility. But the truth is that we bear collective responsibility for failing to build a just and lasting peace in the Middle East thus far.

This was the very fact that we were confronted with on 7 October 2023, when the Israeli people suffered the worst terrorist attack in their history. 1,224 men, women and children were killed. 4834 men, women and children were injured. 251 men, women and children were abducted.

The barbarity of Hamas and those who collaborated in that massacre stunned Israel and the world. For the Israeli soul and the world's conscience, 7 October is a wound that is still raw. We unequivocally condemn it because nothing, ever, anywhere can justify the use of terrorism. Today we think of the victims and their families. We offer our compassion to the Israelis and demand, first and foremost, the unconditional release of all hostages still being held in Gaza. We held a national ceremony in France honouring the 51 French citizens who were murdered on that day, and all the victims of 7 October 2023. We will not forget them. Ever. Just as we will never end the existential fight against anti-Semitism.

We, the French, know how terrorism can bite. We carry in our hearts the memory of the gesture of brotherhood made by dozens of foreign leaders, the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the Palestinian Authority at the forefront, who took part in the march following the 7 January 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris.

We know that there can be no weakness in the face of terrorists.

We also know the dangers of endless wars. We know that the law must always prevail over force. Lastly, we know from our history that the commitment to universality and to peace is a legacy from centuries past and a prerequisite for salvation. I state this in the name of our friendship with Israel, a country to which we maintain an unfaltering commitment. And in the name of our friendship with the Palestinian people, for whom we want the United Nations' initial promise, that of two States living side by side in peace and security, to become a reality.

Yet as we speak, Israel is still expanding its military operations in Gaza with the stated goal of destroying Hamas. However, it is the lives of the hundreds of thousands of displaced, wounded, starving and traumatized people that continue to be destroyed – regardless of the fact that Hamas has been weakened considerably and that negotiations for a lasting ceasefire remain the surest way of securing the hostages' release.

Nothing, nothing justifies continuing the war in Gaza any longer. Nothing. On the contrary, everything calls for the war to be brought to a definitive end now, for want of having done so sooner. To save lives. The lives of Israeli hostages who are still being detained in atrocious conditions. The lives of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians wracked by hunger, suffering, the fear of death, and grief over their loved ones. To save all lives. Because for two years now, it is the denial of one another's humanity and the sacrifice of human life that have prevailed. Yes, since 7 October, what has been denied is one another's lives.

We have been saying this since day one of the war in Gaza : all lives are equally valuable. I know this because I have embraced the families of hostages, in Tel Aviv and later in Paris. I am thinking of the mother of Evyatar David, the starving hostage displayed before the crowds by his torturers. I am thinking of Nimrod Cohen, the nineteen-year-old hostage, whose father I just greeted. I also know this from having gone to the bedside of Palestinian victims of Israeli military operations who sought refuge in El Arish. I will never forget the look I saw in the eyes of those women and children. I am thinking of Rita Baroud, who should have been here with us today and who continues to report on the suffering of her loved ones in Gaza. All lives are equally valuable. And the duty that we all have is to protect one another – a duty that is indivisible, just like our humanity.

There is a solution that can break the cycle of war and destruction. It is by recognizing one another – every person's legitimacy, humanity and dignity. Let those on both sides open their eyes again and see human faces instead of the enemy's mask or a target drawn over them by the war. It's the recognition that Israelis and Palestinians live in a parallel solitude – the solitude of the Israelis following the historic nightmare of 7 October 2023, and the solitude of the Palestinians, who are completely exhausted by this endless war.

The time has come. Because the worst might yet happen ; whether it is the loss of countless more civilian lives, the expulsion of the population of Gaza towards Egypt, the annexation of the West Bank, the death of the hostages held by Hamas, or irreversible events that change the situation on the ground forever. That is why... That is why we must, here and now, pave this path towards peace, because since July, events have accelerated at a terrifying pace. From where we stand now, it is to be feared that the Abraham Accords or the Camp David Accords could be called into question by Israel's action and that peace in the Middle East might become impossible for a long time to come. And so we bear now a historic responsibility. We must do all we can to preserve even the possibility of a two-state solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side, in peace and security.

The time has come. That is why, true to my country's historic commitment in the Middle East, for peace between the Israeli people and the Palestinian people, I declare that France today recognizes the State of Palestine.

This recognition is a way of affirming that the Palestinian people are not a people too many. And that, on the contrary, the Palestinians are a people – as Mahmoud Darwish taught us – who never give up on anything. A people proud of their history, of their roots, and of their dignity.

The recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people does not subtract in any way from the rights of the Israeli people. France has supported those rights from day one and is no less ardent a champion of them. Indeed, we are convinced that this recognition is the only solution that will bring peace to Israel. France has never failed Israel when its security was at risk, including in the face of Iranian strikes.

This recognition of the State of Palestine is a defeat for Hamas and for all those who incite anti-Semitic hatred, who feed anti-Zionist obsessions and desire the destruction of the State of Israel.

France's recognition is accompanied by further recognitions that will also be announced today by Andorra, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, San Marino and the United Kingdom. I thank these States, who have waited with us for this moment and, by answering the call of July this year, have made a choice for responsibility, for rigour and for peace. This follows the choice made by Ireland, Norway, Slovenia and Spain in 2024, and by many others before.

This recognition paves the path for negotiations for the benefit of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

This is the path that was set out in the plan for peace and security for all, which Saudi Arabia and France put to the vote of this Assembly, and which was adopted by a very large majority. It reflects our common ambition to break the cycle of violence and to change the situation on the ground. We have succeeded in taking a step closer to one another, in letting go of our traditional stances, and in agreeing on concrete goals. It is now up to us, together, to initiate a mechanism for peace that addresses the needs of all.

The first phase of this plan for peace and security for all is one of absolute urgency, which is to pair the freeing of the 48 hostages with the end of military operations across all of Gaza. I commend the work done by Qatar, Egypt and the United States to initiate it, and ask Israel to stop anything that might prevent them from its success. Hamas has been defeated militarily by the elimination of its leaders and decision-makers. It must also be defeated politically to be truly dismantled. Once the ceasefire has been agreed, we must make a massive effort collectively to provide assistance to the population of Gaza. I want to thank Egypt and Jordan for their commitment here, and remind Israel of its strict duty to facilitate humanitarian access to Gaza to help the population who today have lost everything.

The second phase will be the stabilization and reconstruction of Gaza. A transitional administration that includes the Palestinian Authority, young Palestinians and security forces, whose training we will expedite, will have the monopoly of security in Gaza. It will implement the dismantling and disarmament of Hamas, with the support of international partners and the resources required for this difficult task. France stands ready to contribute to an international stabilization mission and support, alongside its European partners, the training and equipping of Palestinian security forces. As soon as negotiations allow, the Security Council may decide to deploy a civilian and security support mission, in liaison with the Palestinian authorities, with the consent of the Israeli authorities.

The State of Palestine will also have to give new hope to its population, worn down by years of violence and occupation but also division and negligence. It will therefore have to provide its people with a new and secure framework for democratic expression. President Mahmoud Abbas has made that commitment to Prince Mohammad bin Salman and to me. He has strongly condemned the terrorist attacks of 7 October 2023. He has confirmed his support for the disarmament of Hamas and has committed to excluding it from the future governance of Gaza and the entire Palestinian territory. He has asserted his commitment to fighting hate speech and has promised a thorough overhaul of Palestinian governance.

France will keep a close eye on the full implementation of each of the commitments made to it. This renewed Palestinian Authority is a prerequisite to the success of the essential negotiations that must resume to reach an agreement on each of the questions relating to the definitive status. It is within this framework that I may decide to establish an embassy to the State of Palestine, as soon as all the hostages held in Gaza are released and a ceasefire has been established.

France will be no less demanding regarding Israel. With its European partners, it will set its level of cooperation with Israel based on the measures Israel takes to end the war and negotiate peace.

This will be the path that will lead us to a sovereign, independent and demilitarized State of Palestine that brings together all of its territories, recognizes Israel, and is recognized by Israel, in a region that will at last live in peace.

I also call on those of our Arab and Muslim partners that have not already done so, to uphold their commitment to recognize the State of Israel and to normalize relations with the State of Israel as soon as the State of Palestine is established. In this way, we will demonstrate mutual recognition which will further peace and security of all in the Middle East.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is our peace plan. It sets out a demanding mechanism to exit the war and enter a decisive phase of negotiation. With it, Israeli-Palestinian peace will become the first pillar of a new peace and security architecture in the Middle East. It also makes the possibility of greater economic integration more credible.

Nothing will be possible if the Israel authorities do not take full ownership of our renewed ambition to finally achieve a two-state solution. I understand their reservations and their fears. I am listening to the Israeli people with great respect and have heard their sorrow and fatigue, and I want to believe that the Israeli authorities will also listen and, in turn, commit themselves. I know that the Israeli people and their leaders can find the strength to do this.

I remember when I was just a young man and learned of the tragic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, nearly 30 years ago, who was killed for seeking peace. Right before he died, this heroic warrior of the State of Israel pronounced these words : "I waged war as long as there was no chance for peace". This chance exists today. A total of 142 States are proposing this peace with their hands held out, ready to be shaken.

Yes, the time has come to stop the war in Gaza, the massacres, the death, immediately. The urgency of the situation demands it. The time has come for Israel to live in peace and security, from Galilee to the Red Sea, by way of the Dead Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and Jerusalem. The time has come for the existence of a State of Israel to never be questioned anywhere so that it becomes something that is self-evident.

The time has come to deliver justice to the Palestinian people and thereby recognize a State of Palestine, a brother and neighbour, in Gaza and the West Bank, by way of Jerusalem. The time has come to drive the hideous face of terrorism from these lands and build peace. Yes, build peace, that is why we are meeting here today. And that is the hope that can be constructed. As some are beginning a new year, it is a choice to be made and it is our duty. Peace is much more demanding, much more difficult than any war.

But the time has come.