INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE

2019 LUXEMBOURG CHAIRMANSHIP

IHRA Chair pays tribute to the late French President Jacques Chirac

Today, the French people pay their last respects to their late President Jacques Chirac. In the name of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, I would like to pay tribute to President Chirac for the courageous speech he delivered on 16 July 1995 at the Vel d'Hiv, fifty years after the roundup that cost the lives of many thousands of French Jews.

The history of all our nations contains chapters written in golden letters and pages written in poisonous ink. Nobody will ever forget the determination, the bravery and the fearlessness of the French Resistance movement during World War II, but yes as the President put it, there were situations where "the criminal folly of the occupiers was supported by the French, by the French State". With these words, the President broke with a long lasting culture of denial and forgetting and changed the culture of remembrance in his country. Admitting that there had been a policy of collaboration with the Nazis became the official discourse of the Republic and of all the Presidents who succeeded him.

In these days where we deplore a resurge of denial and distortion of the Holocaust, it is good to remember the words of the President: "In passing on the memory of the Jewish people and of its sufferings, and of the camps; in bearing witness again and again, in acknowledging the errors of the past, and the errors committed by the State; in concealing nothing about the dark hours of our history, we are simply defending an idea of humanity, of human liberty and dignity. We are struggling against the forces of darkness which are constantly at work."

Fully in line with the memorable speech of President Chirac, his successor Emmanuel Macron was right when in 2017, at the 75th anniversary of the roundup of the Vel d'Hiv he said: "By acknowledging its faults, France has opened the way to repair them. That is the sign of a strong nation that can face its past."

For his defense of the historic truth, for having given a new dimension to remembrance in France in relation to events during World War II, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance will always cherish the memory of President Jacques Chirac.