

Dear Director-General,

Dear teachers,

Dear friends of France,

You cannot imagine how pleased I am to address you today. First of all, because here you are all a little bit at home: here you are in France, this house and this Embassy carry more than the French flag, they carry the French spirit, the spirit of its language and culture that has lasted for centuries. My first duty is therefore to welcome you here with the respect, consideration and gratitude you deserve and to pay tribute to your commitment by addressing these sincere words of thanks to you.

Earlier, when I greeted you when you arrived, I had a moment of great nostalgia and remembered my school years, those classrooms, often cold and dark in winter and hot and white in summer, sometimes sitting near the radiator, sometimes in the front row. I spent my childhood and youth there and when I saw you I saw myself 50 years ago - even 60 years ago. And I said to myself, in all humility, that if I am an Ambassador today, it is first of all thanks to the invaluable background of general culture that all the teachers and lecturers - those who were called at that time the "Hussars of the Republic" - who trained me. I know what I owe them, they taught me much more than just reading, writing or counting, they taught me values, they taught me to work and the taste for effort, they opened my mind to the world.

You too have chosen this wonderful profession that honours you. Like those Hussars of the Republic, you train entire generations of future citizens of your country by giving them the best of yourself. You too have made the French language your profession and the profession of the French teacher an ideal. You also devote your life to sharing your passion for the French language, to transmitting this language and the access to the knowledge it carries within it to the youth of your country. I am convinced that some of your many students will go very far in careers in the service of their country. They will not forget the French language you taught them, they will not forget that the world in which we live will be stronger, richer and more united thanks to the cultural and linguistic diversity that it is made up of.

From the bottom of our hearts, accept our thanks and those of the President of the Republic, Mr. Emmanuel Macron, who wished that an international day, now 28th November each year, be dedicated to you and that the teaching of the French language in general be honoured on this occasion.

Many of you have had your dedication recognized by a high distinction from the French Republic, the Order of the Palmes Academiques while others are still waiting, and I would like this International Day to be an opportunity for us to remind you of this. It therefore seems legitimate to me to propose and support many other requests for promotion to the Order of Palmes Academiques. I will see to it personally and we will get down to this task as soon as possible.

I would not want to end without saying again - do not be surprised – how much admiration I have for the French language. Just like you, I love this language. The first words I heard when I came into this world were spoken in French, the French language illuminated my childhood, it accompanied all my studies, it remains, even today, my first communication tool. Both as a diplomat and on a personal level, it remains, in all circumstances, my first guiding principle for thinking about the world,

describing what we perceive, expressing emotion or understanding the complexity of nature. And nothing illustrates the clarity of the French spirit better than the precision of its language, as Nicolas Boileau so well described it in his "poetic art" as early as the 17th century. Allow me the pleasure of quoting for you some of his words that time has not erased: "What is well conceived is clearly stated, and the words to say it come easily". End of quote.

Dear Teachers,

To all of you, I warmly welcome you to this very first celebration of the International Day of the French Teacher. It is dedicated to you, and I wish you success and happiness. I would like to remind you that it has a Caribbean scope and I would not want to miss this opportunity to welcome the presence among us of French teachers from all over the region, from **Antigua, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Martinique, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname** and of course from Trinidad and Tobago.

Our thanks also go out to the organizers of this event who have worked to prepare it, the Alliance Française of Port of Spain, Directorate-General of the Alliance Française in the Anglophone Caribbean, as well as the IFLE (Establishing French as a Language of Communication) programme team and the staff of this Embassy who were all mobilized for this event.

Thank you for your attention.