

International Ministerial Meeting for the Centenary of the First World War

(Paris, October 17th-18th 2013)

Chair's statement

On 17-18 October, at the invitation of Mr Kader ARIF, French Minister for Veterans affairs, a high ranking meeting of ministers, secretaries of State and high level civil servants from thirty countries, took place in Paris in order to prepare and coordinate the upcoming commemorations of the centenary of the First World War.

Recalling that :

- WWI represents the first event in the history of humankind which led to previously unimagined political, economic, social and cultural upheaval throughout the world ;
- For four years, millions of men and women, both civilians and soldiers, were to experience atrocious violence. WWI records are appalling : 65 million men mobilized, around 10 million dead and 21 million wounded ;
- After WWI, in which people on both sides endured similar suffering, great men and women strove for reconciliation to bring people together and worked for a new world order in which international relations were to be regulated by law and consultation-;
- Unfortunately, the hopes placed in the League of Nations were swept away . It is only in the aftermath of WWII, which turned out to be even deadlier than WWI, that the United Nations established a new and long lasting framework for international relations.

The participants agreed that :

- At the dawn of the Centenary of WW1, it is the duty of all to remember those tragic events in order to honour the dead and learn from the past ;
- With the passing of the last witnesses of the War, it behoves us to understand how such atrocities could have occurred between our countries. Commemorating the centenary of WW1 will allow us to share our nations' histories and recall the overall context of this dark period ;
- To give these commemorations a unique character through educational and cultural activities of remembrance and by encouraging bilateral and multilateral cooperation ;
- It is also their responsibility to pass on the memory of the WWI to the younger generation. Future generations must understand its origins and causes. They must understand its

atrocities so that they continue promoting genuine reconciliation and cooperation in pursuit of peace ;

- The centenary of WW1 must provide the opportunity for younger generations to realize that peace is valueable and must constantly be supported and maintained in particular against the threat of harmful ideology ;
- To strongly encourage young people from their countries to discover and compare the many memories of WW1 from across the world.

WWI was a decisive turning point for humankind. The tragic events that occurred between 1914 and 1918 invite us to think about the present and the future of humankind. This is the spirit in which the participants of the meeting are approaching the Centenary of WW1.