



Consulat général de France à New York

Speech of Mr. Philippe Lalliot,
Consulate General of France in New York

Celebrating Hanukkah
Wednesday, December 21th, 2011

גבירותיי ורבותיי,
חברים יקרים,

צוות הקונסוליה ואני שמחים מאוד לארח אתכם הערב לכבוד חג החנוכה. עבורנו, יהודים ולא-יהודים, צרפתים ואמריקאים, זה רגע מיוחד בשנה, בו אנו נאספים על מנת להדליק ולחגוג את אורו של חג האורים. אני מאושר לראות כל כך הרבה אנשים הערב בקונסוליה הצרפתית בניו יורק, זו השנה השלישית ברציפות.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

What a pleasure it is for me and my entire staff to welcome you this evening for the celebration of Hanukkah. This is a special moment for us, Jews and non-Jews, French and American, a moment in the year where in which we gather together in order to celebrate the light of Hanukkah. I take joy in seeing so many of you here this evening for the third year of Hanukkah celebrations at the Consulate General of France in New York.

First and foremost, I would like to warmly thank Harriet Mandel, Rabbi Djian, and the SAR Academy with its orchestra and choir, who will honor us with their music tonight. I would also like to thank our sponsor tonight Royal Wine Corporation. To those of you who have already been to the Consulate, and to those for whom this is the first time – I wish a very warm welcome, and a very happy Hanukkah.

Hanukkah is our opportunity to also celebrate the friendship we share between the Consulate and the Jewish community in New York. In New York City alone, you represent the largest Jewish community outside of Israel, with almost 2 million people.

As French Jews and American Jews, you are the incarnation not only of the religious bonds, but also of the economic, social and historic ties between our two countries. I would like to praise the vitality of this community, which manifests on all levels, and to thank you for the friendship you continue to maintain with France.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Those of you who were here last year at Hanukkah may remember I spoke of the story represented in this magnificent tapestry on my right. It is a war story, which took place more than 21 centuries ago, parallel to the story of the Maccabees' victory over the Syrians who wanted to wipe out Judaism and Hellenize the entire kingdom. It is actually that of Mordecai's triumph, who spoiled Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish people, the story of Purim.

Today I would like to tell the second part of the story of Hanukkah. While the Maccabees freed their Temple, they found a unique, small jug of pure oil containing only enough to light the Menorah for one day. Then the miracle took place, and the oil burnt for 8 days and 8 nights.

Tonight we are lighting the second candle of the *khanukia*, which does not only symbolize the Menorah of the Jerusalem Temple, but also, I believe, is a beautiful metaphor for light. This light, shining in the darkness, is not just a candle illuminating the dark nights of December, but also the Knowledge which enlightens ignorance, Wisdom which calms people's madness. I am convinced that now, more than ever, we are in need of such wisdom to guide us in this world.

Hanukkah is also a very special moment for the children who receive the *Hanukkah gelt*, the money of Hanukkah, and in order to celebrate this convivial family moment, we exceptionally have many children with us tonight at the Consulate. I hope they will be able to find the Hanukkah dreidels with the four initials of the words "*Nes Gadol Haya Sham*" engraved on their sides. The light we are transmitting to them – that of the miracle of Hanukkah – is first and foremost the light of Education. It is this light's initial spark, the one that should help us all reach a better harmony and better understanding between the people.

My Dear Friends,

I would like to recall a moment of light we all experienced with great relief: I am talking about the liberation of Gilad Shalit, a young Israeli and French citizen, after more than five years of captivity. It was a moment of joy we all – French, Americans and Israelis – shared together, and it proves there is still light shining in the darkness.

Together, we are still writing the history we have been sharing, so we may prepare a better future for our children. In order to do so, we want to continue defending our cultures' common values: freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, democracy, and the Rule of Law.

The Arab Springs have shown us – if such proof was ever needed – that all people aspire to freedom. We must continue to be on their sides, as was the case in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and as we still intend on doing in Syria, where the most violent acts are taking place today. We must also continue fighting against any form of intolerance and racism, beginning with anti-Semitism.

I would like to conclude by renewing my friendship, as well as that of France, which I here represent. The ties of friendship between France and the Jewish community go a long way back, and are very solid, especially here in New York. Last June, Alain Juppé, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with the heads of Jewish organizations at the Consulate in order to discuss the major international issues at stake, and mainly those concerning the Near- and the Middle-East. I am glad this dialog between the French authorities and the Jewish community continues here at the Consulate. I also wish to enrich this dialog even more, and in doing so, I will always remain open to your questions, and determined to listen, and try to answer them.

I will now leave the floor to the young and talented musicians of the SAR Academy, who came especially tonight, like last year, to celebrate Hanukkah with joy. I would like to thank their French teacher, Helen Sprinkle, the Choir Master, Kenneth Birnbaum, and the Director of the band, Anat Barak. We will first hear the orchestra, then listen to the choral music which will be interpreting traditional songs. Please give them a warm welcome and I invite you to sing the familiar songs along with them.

Thank you very much and *khag khanoukah sameakh* (joyeuse fête).l.