



26 May 2011

PRESS RELEASE

Deauville Summit Spouses' Programme

Working session on overcoming functional illiteracy

Mrs Carla Bruni-Sarkozy invited the spouses of the heads of state and government taking part in the G8 Summit in Deauville to join her for a working session about overcoming illiteracy.

Mrs Carla Bruni-Sarkozy wished to exchange with them about the battle that she leads in France to tackle illiteracy. Together, they shared their respective experiences and discussed the causes of illiteracy and its solutions with Marie-Thérèse Geffroy, Director of France's National Agency to Fight Illiteracy (ANLCI) and Adama Ouane, Director of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

Worldwide, tens of millions of men and women face illiteracy. In Europe, an estimated 80 million people have insufficient command of reading, writing and basic arithmetic skills.

More than 3 million French citizens between the ages of 18 and 65 who have attended school, have lost the ability to read, write or count because of lack of practice or difficult learning conditions.

Being illiterate means not being able to performing the simple tasks of everyday life, such as writing a cheque, reading a child's school report, understanding a work or safety instruction, or calculating amounts.

Illiteracy is a screaming problem that goes unheard. It is too often confused with the situation of people who have never been schooled (analphabetism) or with the condition of those who do not know a language upon arrival in a new country. People facing illiteracy frequently conceal their difficulties out of shame or fear of stigmatisation.

Illiteracy does not mean lack of intelligence, refusal to learn, or laziness. Half of French people facing illiteracy have a job. In order to work, adults facing illiteracy develop coping skills to avoid having to read or write, but these come at the cost of enormous effort.

There are two ways to reduce illiteracy – first, by preventing it since early childhood and throughout schooling, and then by helping young people and adults with difficulties to overcome illiteracy.

In order to reach this objective, France set up the National Agency to Fight Illiteracy (Agence Nationale de Lutte contre l'Illettrisme - ANLCI), an umbrella organisation dedicated to preventing and reducing illiteracy. The ANLCI enables more than 150 institutions to coordinate their work and share best practice. The government is increasingly engaged in this battle, alongside industry, trade unions and civil society.

In Europe, the European Commission recently set up a high-level expert group on illiteracy, tasked with making concrete recommendations to improve the prevention and reduction of illiteracy in its member states.

At the international level, UNESCO supports the implementation of sustainable policies to improve access to lifelong learning around the world. For UNESCO, the fight against illiteracy means promoting the right to education set forth by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

For more information on overcoming illiteracy, please visit the websites of the France's National Agency to Fight Illiteracy (ANLCI) <http://www.anlci.gouv.fr/> and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) <http://www.uil.unesco.org/>.