

Le
Sommet
francophone
Paris, du 17 au 19 février
1986



The
Francophone
Summit
Paris, February 17-19,
1986

THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Context

French is the mother tongue of more than 100 million of the world's inhabitants, spread over five continents. This figure is expected to reach 166 million by the end of the century. French is also the official language of countries whose populations total 175 million, or 3.9% of the world's people. It is anticipated that this number will rise to 260 million, or 4.3% of the total, by the year 2000.

French is, therefore, among the world's five or six most widely spoken languages, and it can still be considered the second most important international language.

It must however be added that French, like other major tongues, has to some extent declined as a language of science and technology, because of the predominance of English. Because language is one of the most fundamental expressions of a culture and civilization, it is important to ensure that Francophones will still be able to name new concepts with words and terms which conform to the spirit of their language. Furthermore, since language is the essential vehicle for communicating and expanding knowledge, incentives should be found which will encourage the production of a higher proportion of scientific papers written in French and (which is even more important) authored by Francophones.

From a general standpoint, if French is to retain a leading position among major world languages, steps must be taken not only to encourage its specific employment as a scientific and technical language, but also to increase its use in the great international forums such as the United Nations and to encourage people to acquire it as a second language.