



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Reception in honour of Télécoms sans Frontières

London, 13 November 2012

Jean-François Cazenave, President of *Télécoms sans Frontières*,
and Monique Lanne-Petit, its Director,

Charlene Lake, Vice-President of AT&T,

David Langhorn, its Vice-President for the UK and Ireland,
and Nicolas Lemoine, Vice-President for France,

Jonathan Chapman of the BBC,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm very happy to welcome you to the French Residence this evening. My guests include many who hold senior positions in telecoms companies.

The reason why I've invited you and AT&T here tonight isn't to launch a call for tenders to improve the Embassy's telecommunications!

No, that's not the purpose of our meeting this evening. If that were the case I'd be very wary of sharing a glass of champagne with you – as I'll do in a few minutes' time – before being fully satisfied that you'd actively contribute to our strenuous cost-cutting efforts!

No, we're gathered tonight to support and celebrate an originally French NGO which is now establishing itself in the UK: *Télécoms sans Frontières*.

Télécoms sans Frontières champions a great idea which, like all great ideas, is a simple one: in a situation of crisis, conflict or natural disaster, communication becomes almost as crucial a need as shelter or food.

Personally I very much support this idea, because my experience as a diplomat has proven to me how true it is. I'll come back to this.

I also think our guest Jonathan Chapman of the BBC will agree with me, having covered on location the ravages of Hurricane Katrina and organized the BBC's media coverage of disasters like earthquakes in Turkey and Haiti and the tsunami in Japan.

As well as helping the victims of these extreme situations themselves, the telecommunications networks set up by TSF enable emergency services and other humanitarian players to coordinate their action in order to be quicker and more effective.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I was saying, in my career as a diplomat I've seen many crises and conflicts. I was French Ambassador in Beirut when the Israeli-Lebanese conflict broke out in the summer of 2006.

In the midst of the turmoil, I and my teams coordinated an operation to evacuate nearly 14,000 people: mostly French nationals, but a third of them from other countries we'd also taken responsibility for.

I know that at these moments, which are the most difficult and distressing for individuals – both those who are staying and those who are leaving – communicating with loved ones from whom one is separated, reassuring them, sometimes also sharing the worst news, is an essential need.

I know that in Lebanon, TSF was able to act to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations, particularly UNICEF, one of whose officials said in September 2006: “TSF’s services are excellent and have been essential to the proper functioning of the Humanitarian Hub in Tyre. TSF’s telecommunications centre has enabled us to better coordinate the NGOs’ action.”

This is just one of the countless testimonies of humanitarian workers and civilians alike who, at some point, have had cause to thank TSF volunteers for connecting them and thus offering them a lifeline.

So now *Télécoms Sans Frontières* – with the support of AT&T, which I thank for proposing this meeting – is a charity in the UK.

I very much hope that this new phase in the development of a French-born NGO can enable it to secure the resources necessary for it to continue the remarkable, unique job it does.

The whole purpose of our meeting today is to introduce you to, or add to what you already know about, *Télécoms sans Frontières* and its ambitions.

In a moment I'll be handing over to Charlene Lake, Vice-President at AT&T, which has supported TSF for the past 10 years, alongside other sponsors such as the Aquitaine region, Inmarsat, Eutelsat, Vodafone and many others.

Then later we'll have the pleasure of listening to Jean-François Cazenave, who is TSF's President, as well as one of its founders, and continues to carry forward this worthy project today. In 2010, your work, *cher* President, earned you an appointment to the rank of *Chevalier* in one of our most prestigious national orders, the *Ordre National de la Légion d'Honneur*. I look forward to you getting something from the Order of the British Empire one day – I hope you do, at any rate!

Finally, we'll be hearing from Jonathan Chapman who, as I said, is a highly experienced reporter covering major international crises.

I wish you all a very pleasant evening.

Long live *Télécoms sans Frontières*, we wish it every continued success!