

**23rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF DATA PROTECTION COMMISSIONERS
« PRIVACY - A HUMAN RIGHT »
PARIS, 24 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2001**

OPENING SPEECH
By Michel GENTOT, President
National Data Protection and Liberties Commission

Madam Representative of the President of the Republic,

Mr Representative of the Prime Minister,

Mr Representative of the President of the Senate,

Mr Representative of the Director-General of UNESCO,

Mr Vice-President of the Council of State,

Mr Public Prosecutor of the Court of Appeal,

Mr Representative of the Presiding President of the Court of Appeal,

The Representatives of the Presiding President and of Madam Public Prosecutor of the
Revenue Court,

The Presidents of Personal Data and Privacy Protection Authorities,

Madam President of the National Council of Competition,

Mr Representative of the President of the Telecommunications Regulatory Body,

Mr President of the National Human Rights Consultative Committee,

Ladies, Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

“Private Life – A Human Right”, it is around this theme that we are united here, representing almost 50 different countries, from 5 continents.

This presence – our presence here together – whether it demonstrates complete adhesion, or at least, impatient interest, is, after the so dramatic and so painful events of the 11th September, the sign of a “coalition” whose importance must be stressed.

Even more so, when New York has just been disfigured.

New York, the universal city, the city of the world where nobody feels a stranger.

A city of refuge or of hope for so many peoples and so many religions who made it multi-faceted, mixed-race, tolerant, open and welcoming to the world.

The fact that we are so many, from such varied geographical, cultural, and professional horizons, today in Paris to discuss the theme of privacy and the new technologies, is a witness to our attachment to liberty, to Human Rights, but also to our interest for collective discussion, and beyond our history or our geography, to the importance we attach to that, which at the hour of globalisation of technologies, is little by little becoming a common basis for civilisation. On this road “any rest would mean defeat”. And such defeat is the last thing we could agree to.

Thank you one and all for wanting to bear witness to this, despite the circumstances, or, precisely, because of them.

And we will bear witness here, at the Sorbonne University, where we can meet for these three days thanks to the kindness of the Rector and Chancellor of the Universities. A place for forming minds and intellectual controversies, the Sorbonne has especially been a place crossed by the History of Man, from the Middle Ages to more recent upheavals, particularly those of the late ‘70s. In short, a link of knowledge and reflection between the archaeology of burgeoning humanism and contestation, sometimes violent, in the name of Human Rights.

It is in this spirit that, at the hour of the new technologies, we wished to place this conference under high patronage:

Averroës, the Muslim philosopher from Cordoba and the “ferryman” for Aristotelian thinking: a link between civilizations,

Gutenberg, the inventor of printing and of the book as a nomadic object: a link between men, Erasmus, the Christian from Rotterdam, or tolerance versus fanaticism,

Copernic, the Polish astronomer, or the triumph of science over dogma,

and finally, Montaigne, or the free spirit of modern Man, wise, traveller, universalist.

“I consider all men my compatriots” he said. As for Erasmus, we know the saying of one of his contemporaries: “I wanted to find out if Erasmus of Rotterdam belonged to this party or to the opposite party. But someone answered me ‘*Erasmus est homo pro se*’ “.

“Privacy – A Human Right”, that humanism and that universalism are, more than ever, at the hour of the new technologies of information and communication, a common objective which, I am certain, will inspire all our work.

I earlier mentioned patronage, now I want to mention another one, which is not that of a man, but that of a city with which we wish to associate this entire conference. Ms Sheila Chevallier has kindly agreed to read a few verses by Walt Whitman, the Manhattan poet. Let us together listen in silence to this homage to the future New York

Reading of the poem by Sheila Chevallier.

I now declare open the 23rd International Conference of Data Protection Commissioners