Macron criticises Israel on Gaza, Lebanon operations

AFP – French President Emmanuel Macron called Saturday for a halt on arms deliveries to Israel for use in Gaza, provoking a sharp response from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Macron also criticised Netanyahu's decision to send troops into ground operations in Lebanon.

"I think that today, the priority is that we return to a political solution, that we stop delivering weapons to fight in Gaza," Macron told French broadcaster France Inter.

"France is not delivering any," he added during the interview, which was recorded Tuesday.

Macron reiterated his concern over the conflict in Gaza that is continuing despite repeated calls for a ceasefire.

"I think we are not being heard," he said. "I think it is a mistake, including for the security of Israel," he said, adding that the war was leading to "hatred".

His comments brought a swift response from Netanyahu.

"As Israel fights the forces of barbarism led by Iran, all civilised countries should be standing firmly by Israel's side," Netanyahu said in a statement issued by his office.

"Yet, President Macron and other Western leaders are now calling for arms embargoes against Israel. Shame on them."

Israel was fighting a war on several fronts against groups backed by arch-foe Iran, the statement added.

Macron' office responded with a statement of its own later Saturday.

France is a "steadfast friend of Israel", it said, describing

Netanyahu’s reaction as “excessive and detached from the friendship between France and Israel”.

Qatar, a key mediator in Gaza ceasefire talks, said Macron’s statement was “an important and appreciated step towards stopping the war”.

Jordan welcomed the French leader’s remarks and stressed “the importance of imposing a complete ban on the export of weapons to Israel” and “real consequences” for the country’s actions.

– Ceasefire call –

In his interview, Macron also said avoiding an escalation in Lebanon was a “priority.”

“Lebanon cannot become a new Gaza,” he added.

And he returned to the subject Saturday in a speech to a conference of French-speaking nations in Paris.

While both Paris and Washington had called for a ceasefire, said Macron, “I regret that Prime Minister Netanyahu has made another choice, has taken this responsibility, in particular, for ground operations on Lebanese soil.”

The 88 members of the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF), including France and Canada, have called for an “immediate and lasting” ceasefire in Lebanon, he added.

But Macron reaffirmed Israel’s right to self-defence and said that on Monday he would be meeting relatives of Franco-Israelis held hostage in Gaza.

On Monday, Israel marks the first anniversary of the October 7 Hamas attack that sparked the Gaza war and has now engulfed neighbouring Lebanon, creating a perilous regional crisis.

The attack resulted in the deaths of 1,205 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official

figures that include hostages killed in captivity.

Israel’s retaliatory offensive on Gaza has so far killed at least 41,825 people, a majority of them civilians, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run Palestinian territory. The UN has said those figures are reliable.

AFP