

## France denies Chirac adviser with Zaire rebels.

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PARIS, May 7 (Reuter) – French President Jacques Chirac’s office denied on Wednesday that his African affairs adviser was in the Zairean city of Lubumbashi for talks with rebel leader Laurent Kabila, as reported by rebel officials and diplomats.

Presidential spokeswoman Catherine Colonna told Reuters : “Michel Dupuch is in Paris and not in Zaire. He will meet (special U.S. envoy) Bill Richardson at the Elysee palace tomorrow morning.”

A Reuters report from Lubumbashi quoted rebel officials and diplomats as saying Dupuch, a former ambassador to Abidjan, had arrived in rebel-held Zaire along with retired French general Jeannou Lacaze for talks with Kabila, whose forces have captured most of the country and are closing in on Kinshasa.

But Colonna said Lacaze was not on any official mission and Dupuch was not accompanying him. A reporter who telephoned the presidential adviser’s office was told he was in the building in a meeting. Lacaze, a former armed forces chief of staff, has regularly visited Iraq, officially on private business trips, maintaining a dialogue with President Saddam Hussein while Paris and Baghdad have no diplomatic relations in the wake of the Gulf War.

France has sought to establish discreet contacts with Kabila in recent weeks after backing ailing President Mobutu Sese Seko up to the last minute.