Macron acknowledges France’s role in torture during Algerian war

Emmanuel Macron became the first French leader to publicly acknowledge the state’s role in torture during the Algerian war of independence, shedding light on one of the darkest moments in France’s colonial history.

On Thursday, the French president acknowledged that Maurice Audin, a pro-independence activist who vanished after being arrested in 1957, had been tortured and killed by the army as part of “a legally-established system.” Mr Macron also vowed to declassify information to help elucidate other disappearances.

Mr Audin’s “death was allowed by a law passed in parliament in 1956, that gave the government carte blanche to restore public order in Algeria,” Mr Macron said in a statement on Thursday after paying a visit to the victim’s widow on the outskirts of Paris. “It is important that this history be known and confronted with courage and lucidity.”

The admission of responsibility ends six decades of controversy during which the Audin family and historians sought to challenge the official claims the young mathematician had escaped prison. Socialist president François Hollande recognised in 2014 that Mr Audin, a 25 year old mathematician and father of three when he was arrested, had died while detained. President Macron goes further by underlining the wider responsibility of the state.

By doing so, the French leader meets a longtime demand from the left, who has lately grown disenchanted with his pro-business policies and tax breaks for the wealthy. But he also risks opening old wounds stemming from a bloody conflict that deeply divided the country and led to the chaotic repatriation of 1m French colons in 1962, when the conflict ended.

In February 2017, during a visit to Algiers, Mr Macron triggered uproar after describing colonisation as a “crime against humanity” and calling on France to apologise. Mr Hollande in 2012 went as far as recognising the “bloody repression” of Algerian protesters by police in Paris in October 1961 and the poor treatment of the Harkis, the Algerians who had fought for France.