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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Federico Mayor

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the ceremony for the awarding of the
1997 Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize

Dakar (Senegal), 17 June 1998

(The Director-General began his address in French)

As this century and millennium draw to a close, the failure of violence, war and constraint is obvious, as is the high price of that failure in terms of suffering and human life.

A cry of love and hope is arising today out of the heart of Africa, calling for tolerance, sharing and peace. On this land wounded by the memory of slavery, bathed in the blood of thousands of innocent victims of hatred, on this land which cannot forget, but which knows how to forgive, this cry is becoming a commitment. This cry is becoming a summons to all the inhabitants of the world.

Mr President of the Republic of Senegal,
Mr President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire,
Mr Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic,
Distinguished Members of the Jury,
Prizewinners,
Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all to say how pleased I am to be with you on the occasion of the presentation of the Felix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize to Mr Fidel Ramos, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and to Mr Nur Misuari, President of the Moro National Liberation Front.

I am delighted that this great festival of peace is taking place this year in Dakar, where we have come to honour our two prizewinners and to express our gratitude to the sponsor of the Prize, Mr Abdou Diouf, President of the Republic of Senegal.

The welcome which President Diouf has in store for us is worthy of the great traditions of Senegalese hospitality and UNESCO is happy to come to honour the eminent winners of the Prize in a country like Senegal, which places peace at the top of its priorities.

I am pleased and very moved to tell President Diouf how deeply grateful UNESCO is for the all-important backing that he has given the Prize since he agreed, at the request of President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, to become its sponsor. Thanks to his support, the Prize can continue under the best auspices.

I would also like to pay tribute to Mr Henri Konan Bédié, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, who has once again come to demonstrate his attachment to the Prize which bears the name of his illustrious predecessor. President Bédié has worked unceasingly to promote and to increase the prestige of the Prize which, in less than a decade, has become one of highest international distinctions in the service of peace. It is my earnest wish, Mr President, that the Yamoussoukro Declaration on Peace, adopted by acclamation on 5 December 1997 at the launching of the Houphouët-Boigny Foundation for Peace Research, this Declaration of which you are in a way the father, will represent, on the threshold of the year 2000 - International Year for the Culture of Peace - a world commitment to understanding, harmony and tolerance.

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I should like to address my warmest greetings to the Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic who is doing us the honour of representing President El Hadj Omar Bongo here. President Bongo is well aware of the unique value of peace, of which he has become the ardent defender in his country and to the re-establishment of which he has contributed beyond the frontiers of Gabon. Your presence here today in Dakar, Mr Vice-President, increases the symbolic significance of this ceremony by associating with it the pillar of stability in central Africa.

Lastly, my thanks and congratulations go to the President of the Jury, Mr Henry Kissinger, and to the other Jury members, whose judicious choices have, year after year, enhanced the prestige and the credibility of the Prize.

Presidents,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The award of the 1997 Felix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize to President Fidel Ramos and to Mr Nur Misuari, President of the Moro National Liberation Front, celebrates a historic moment in the life of the Republic of the Philippines - the signing on 2 September 1996 of the General Peace Accord ending a 30-year civil war. UNESCO could not receive better news than this promise of a future of stability and development for the Philippine people at last reunited. This Peace Accord not only marks the end of hostilities but above all constitutes a solemn act of recognition of Others in the fullness of their dignity, legitimate ambitions and rights.

Peace has therefore been officially proclaimed. What remains now is to root it firmly in hearts and minds. In this context, the programme for the integration and social advancement of the Muslim populations of Mindanao, drawn up by the Government of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front, takes on its full importance.

President Fidel Ramos and Mr Nur Misuari have clearly understood that civil peace is not just the absence of war. It is the fruit of a sense of belonging to one and the same entity, and of the will to live together and construct a new community.

Through their political courage and their resolve to transcend the past so as better to construct the future, the two winners of the 1997 Felix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize have set their country on the path of that national reconciliation to which all their fellow citizens aspire.

(The Director-General continued his address in English)

Presidents,
Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a propitious moment to remember with gratitude and admiration all those who have been able to sit around a table and to end often very long periods of confrontation, violence, hatred. This has been achieved through willingness and imagination in El Salvador, Guatemala, Mozambique and Northern Ireland. Today, at this award ceremony, I appeal, as Director-General of the Organization of the United Nations in charge of 'building peace in the minds of men', for an immediate ceasefire wherever a fratricidal conflict exists and for perseverance in continuing ongoing peace processes. Violence breeds violence. It is the word,

not the sword, that will win at the end. In the Middle East, Kosovo, Guinea-Bissau and elsewhere, it is time to stop the reason of force and follow the force of reason. Our mission, commitment and promise is: 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war', as stated in the first paragraph of the United Nations Charter. We must invest more in peace-building, in development, in education and health, and less in the capacity for massive destruction.

We cannot change the past. We can learn from it, but we cannot modify it. We can describe it, but we cannot write it. However, we can change the future; it is our best heritage, and stands intact, untouched before us. We can share and care better. We can decide to use dialogue, tolerance and non-violent approaches. We can end a culture of war with the century and start a culture of peace with the new millennium.

(The Director-General concluded his address in French)

Distinguished prizewinners,

Everyone devoted to peace in the world is delighted by the Jury's decision to award the 1997 Felix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize to you and hopes that the historic accord you have signed will be the beginning of an era of peace, prosperity and happiness for the Philippine people.