Award Ceremony of the
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize
UNESCO, 6 July 1994

Address by Mr Yasser Arafat
President of the Palestinian National Authority
1993 Prizewinner

Excellencies Heads of State and Friends,
His Excellency Mr Federico Mayor,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish first of all to express my gratitude and pride to be honoured by the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, together with Mr Yitzhak Rabin and Mr Shimon Peres. We have been partners in making the peace of the brave in our region and we still pursue our efforts in order to consolidate that peace and to attain all its objectives.

It is natural that this Prize should acquire such a remarkable status since its very beginning a few years ago. Indeed, it carries the name of one of the outstanding and faithful sons of Africa and one of its judicious leaders who have worked throughout their life for peace, mutual understanding and dialogue. We are really sad not to find him in our midst today to witness the achievement of one of his most cherished aims, especially when he was Chairman of the Committee of the Wise Men of Africa that was set up years ago to bring closer the Arab and Israeli viewpoints. He also blessed and supported the efforts made by the late Dr Esam Sartawi, a Palestinian martyr and a hero, who was assassinated while struggling for the cause of peace. This Prize has been established by UNESCO which receives us today (...). UNESCO is a minaret which constitutes one of the facets of international legality and carries the formidable task of formulating the cultural and human concepts which are being shaped now to meet the ambitions of humanity at the threshold of the twenty-first century (...). UNESCO is a minaret known for its dynamism and vitality under the leadership of its Director-General Mr Federico Mayor.

Finally, it is no coincidence that the ceremony for the award of this Prize should take place in this ancient and beautiful city which hosted a series of negotiations which led to the signature of peace agreements between Palestinians and Israelis. The role of President
Mitterrand and the French Government has been instrumental in facilitating the onward march of peace in the last years and in turning peace into a concrete reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Peace Prize which I have been awarded today is a medal of honour for the Palestinian people in recognition of their struggle for freedom and peace. Our people, who have never faltered in their determination to obtain their rights, freedom and independence, are grateful today to all those who stood by them during their ordeal, and who were in fact advocating freedom, justice and peace the world over.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My visit today to your friendly country and to UNESCO in particular, has an historical significance, since it is my first visit to a friendly country, coming from our sacred land. Allow me on behalf of my people, to convey to you their warmest greetings and best wishes for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace, a peace of the brave, in the Middle East region, hoping that concerted efforts will continue to overcome all the difficulties that confront the peace option.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The masses of the Palestinian people have expressed their joy and satisfaction last week, in all our towns, villages and camps. The whole world has witnessed these manifestations of happiness which indicate our longing for freedom, for the end of occupation and for the beginning of the establishment of our rights to self-determination, independence, the edification of a State, and the end of bitter decades of exile, suffering and persecution.

These manifestations of joy also bear witness to our people's support for and belief in the peace option which will enable them to practice once more their natural right to freedom, and to assume their historical role as part of the peoples of the region, in building the region's future, stability and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The historical achievement represented by the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and the Israeli Government, has required a great deal of courage and firmness from both parties. It also needed vision and foresight in order to explore the future and to assimilate the lessons of history.

A creative spirit has nourished and inspired this process, which has led to opening the door of genuine peace to one of the most complex conflicts of this century. I am sure that the two parties who have taken this path are fully aware of the extent of the dangers and difficulties and of the magnitude of challenges and the omens of failure. But I am sure that both of us have been aware of the gains to be reaped by our peoples in pursuing the path of peace. We have been aware that we are destined to build another future for the new generations. Consequently, we should stress today that the challenges facing us require that we maintain and uphold this creative spirit that has led to the road of peace; this forward-looking spirit that urges us to overcome past bitterness and present suffering.
We face today the challenge of peace, which means that our agreements should be turned into a concrete reality, and that texts, political and legal terms and technical details should be translated into action, so as to enable our peoples to apprehend the value of peace, which is tantamount to freedom, independence, security, justice and prosperity. This is the type of peace which can only be protected, as emphasized by UNESCO, by ensuring equal dignity to all peoples and respect of human life and rights.

The great challenge we face nowadays requires the accomplishment of three tasks:

Firstly: strict, scrupulous and rapid implementation of the various points of the peace agreements. Undoubtedly, the implementation process during the last two months has not been quick enough to extend Palestinian authority to the whole territory of the West Bank and to organize Palestinian legislative elections after the evacuation of Israeli troops from residential areas. Such measures should be followed as early as possible by dealing with matters concerning the final status particularly of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and borders, in keeping with international law represented by Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Progress towards negotiations on the final status and abstaining from any action which may adversely affect them, are vital matters for ensuring the peace process which might collapse if not completed.

Allow me to point out here that the experience of the last two months has emphasized a classical lesson of negotiations. The momentum of the implementation process helps by its mechanisms and intrinsic laws towards the reaching of simple solutions, in record time, to many of the thorny and complex issues which have taken up dozens of days of heated and laborious discussions.

The second task is to protect and promote peace by meeting its requirements. The cornerstone in this endeavour is full support for the reconstruction process in our country. Our people, who managed by their vitality, creative abilities and steadfastness to preserve their national identity regardless of years of exile and occupation, are fully determined to spare no effort in the construction of our national edifice so that our country may remain as it has always been throughout history... a minaret of civilization and progress and a haven of tolerance. But this aim cannot be attained without the active participation of the international community, the economically advanced countries, international financial institutions and the donor countries which should assume their moral, political and material responsibilities and offer prompt and adequate assistance to enable the Palestinian National Authority to shoulder its tasks in building and reconstructing the infrastructure devastated by the occupation. Peace is established on two basic elements, namely, political agreements and the financial and economic measures that should lead to the implementation of these agreements. In the absence of one of these two basic elements, the peace process, however noble and important it may be, will be liable to collapse. The Palestinian side should not alone bear the brunt of peace while others reap its fruit.

The third task is to widen the circle of peace and to attain complete and comprehensive peace. While we welcome the concrete progress achieved between Jordan and Israeli, we hope that similar progress will be realized between Syria and Israel and between Lebanon and Israel so that a comprehensive and just peace can be reached between the Palestinian State, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, in keeping with the resolutions of international legality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
We have embarked on the process of building an entity that promotes the values and principles of democracy, pluralism and the rule of law, guarantees human rights and lays the foundation for a free economy that responds to development requirements and national prosperity. In this process, we need support from all those who cherish peace. Peace in our region, as I said before, is not only in the interest of Palestinians, Arabs or Israelis but it is also in the interest of all the States and peoples of the world. It is a must for all of us.

I would like to avail myself of this opportunity to renew before you and in the name of the PLO and the Palestinian people, our commitment to the peace agreements and to their implementation. We are fully determined to continue our sincere efforts for the preservation and completion of peace for the sake of the peoples of the region, and the peoples of the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at this juncture to pay tribute to the outstanding role played by the late Johan Jörgen Holst, and to say how much we miss him today. We are sorry that he is unable to contribute by his efforts, wisdom and patience to the completion of a task which he rendered possible when others thought that it was impossible.

Mr Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin,

We have been partners in bringing about this historical achievement for the sake of our peoples and our children. I am confident that we have the same will and the same determination to be, with our two peoples, partners in the completion of that achievement for the establishment of a genuine, just and comprehensive peace in our region, which is looking forward to a new era of peace, cooperation and stability. For our part, we shall protect the peace of the brave regardless of all difficulties, obstacles, troubles or suffering. This is a commitment which I make in my name and on behalf of our Palestinian people. I hope that all the parties directly or indirectly concerned will hold fast to the same commitment for the future of our children and your children and for a new Middle East.

Once again, thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen.