Award Ceremony of the  
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize  
UNESCO, 24 September 1999

Opening of the Ceremony by Mr Alioune Traoré  
Executive Secretary of the Prize

Mr President of the Republic of Senegal,  
Mr President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Executive Secretariat of the Prize is delighted to see so many of you here to pay tribute to the two peacemakers we are honoring today, Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, and United States Senator George J. Mitchell.

Your presence encourages us to persevere in consolidating this important international distinction. The presentation of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize has become an occasion for the annual meeting of the friends of Africa and the defenders of UNESCO's lofty ideals.

Before giving the floor to the Director-General for his welcoming address, I should like to express all our gratitude to the Patron of the Prize, President Abdou Diouf, who kindly hosted the ceremony for the presentation of the Prize last year in Dakar. His fidelity to the memory of the Sage of Africa is a great lesson to us all.

My most respectful greetings are also addressed to Mr Henri Konan Bédié, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, who has furthered the political work and economic achievements of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny.

I should also like to pay my respects to Ms Elizabeth Diouf, First Lady of Senegal, and Ms Henriette Konan Bédié, First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire.
It gives me pleasure to draw attention to the presence among us of a delegation from the Republic of Guinea, representing President Lansana Conté, under the leadership of Mr Eugène Camara, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, to whom I address a word of welcome.

On this tenth anniversary of the Prize, I am moved at the thought of this great visionary who was and remains a giant of history, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who devoted his life to the peace and happiness of all.

I see unfolding before my eyes the events that he had foreseen – what has happened in South Africa, in the Middle East, in Latin America, in Asia, in Europe – in short, political developments unimaginable at the time.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I particularly wish to pay tribute to the major role played by the President of the Jury, Dr Henry A. Kissinger, who has been the pillar of the Prize since its founding. His loyalty to his friend Félix Houphouët-Boigny is exemplary. It is shown in the support he has given us day by day in the implementation and international promotion of the Prize.

Indeed, I am happy to express my warmest gratitude to the members of the Jury present on this rostrum, whom it is my duty to introduce to this august assembly:

- Ms Gabrielle Kirk McDonald (USA), President of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, who is sitting among us for the first time at this ceremony.
- Mr Mário Soares, former President of the Portuguese Republic.
- Mr Jean Foyer (France), Former Minister of Justice under General de Gaulle.
- Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui (Algeria), former Minister, Judge at the International Court of Justice, The Hague, former President of the latter.
- Professor Iba Der Thiam (Senegal), former Minister, Deputy in the National Assembly.
- Professor Andréas Ådahl (Sweden), former Ambassador to UNESCO, former member of the Executive Board, Ambassador in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The three members of the Jury who were unable to attend today owing to circumstances beyond their control have asked me to convey their congratulations to the two prize-winners. The members concerned are:

- Professor Juan Antonio Carrillo Salcedo (Spain), former Judge at the European Court of Human Rights, member of the Institute for International Law.
- Mr Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (Argentina), President of the International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples, Nobel Peace Prize laureate.
- Mr Andrew Young (USA), a former companion in arms of Martin Luther King, former Ambassador to the United Nations.
Allow me now to turn to Mr Federico Mayor, who is participating in the ceremony for the presentation of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for the last time as Director-General.

Mr Director-General,

I should like first of all to thank you publicly. Before your election at the head of the Organization, none of the nine prizes awarded by UNESCO bore the name of an African. You corrected this injustice, observing that Africa did not lack great figures.

Your choice was a shrewd one, for you chose Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the Sage of Africa, whom General de Gaulle referred to as a first-rate political mind, a “tireless advocate of peace” in the terms of the General Conference resolution establishing the Prize.

As an African, I was very appreciative of Federico Mayor's respect and consideration for my continent and its peoples.

It was you, Mr Director-General, who founded the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, and you who constantly supported it.

By endowing it with a flexible, operational structure within the Secretariat, you laid the foundations for its success at the outset. You made it possible for the distinguished Jury responsible for it to work quite independently.

Your name will go down in history as that of a sincere friend of Africa and a defender of the cause of peace in the world.

That being the case, it was not surprising that you came to meet President Félix Houphouët-Boigny and that your long talks with him in Yamoussoukro led to the deep friendship that bound you to the great Sage of our continent.

You understood and insisted that Africa should be one of UNESCO's priorities and that the Organization was the conscience of humanity.

For if our Organization was merely an agency or institute of education, science, culture and communication, it would not have aroused such passionate involvement and enthusiasm.

Mr Director-General,

When referring to the founders of UNESCO, you have always believed that the ultimate purpose of the Organization was peace. That belief was shared, moreover, by one of your most illustrious predecessors, the Frenchman Mr René Maheu, who said that, I quote: “It is UNESCO's vocation to promote and strengthen the fellowship of conscience. For UNESCO, education, science, culture and information, the immediate objects of its endeavours, are not ends in themselves, no matter how noble they may be: they are only means to ends and areas for moral action in the service of peace. The peace we want to help build in adult wills and in the hearts of children, so that it may be transmitted from the actual lives of people to the order of States, is the peace of the reign of justice”.

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This humanistic conception of the Organization’s vocation, which you also own, Mr Director-General, is shared by Pope John-Paul II, who, on the occasion of his memorable visit to the Headquarters in June 1980, said “UNESCO is the creation of nations who, in the wake of the terrible Second World War, were impelled by what may be called a spontaneous desire for peace, union and reconciliation”.

It is the same spontaneous desire for peace, union and reconciliation that moves you, Mr Mayor, and also inspires today’s distinguished prize-winners.

Thank you.