Award Ceremony of the
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize
Dakar, Senegal, 17 June 1998

Address by Mr Jean Foyer
Vice-President of the Jury

Mr President of the Republic of Senegal,
Mr President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire,
Mr Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic,
Mr Director-General of UNESCO,
Distinguished Prizewinners,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the absence of Mr Henry Kissinger, unable to attend, it is my honour to explain - as if there were still any need - the considerations that decided the Jury to award the Prize jointly to H.E. Mr Fidel V. Ramos, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and Mr Nur Misuari, Governor of the Muslim Autonomous Region of Mindanao.

Mr President of the Republic of Senegal, allow me first to recall a personal memory which moves me deeply at this moment. Thirty-eight years ago, almost to the day, Louis Jacquinot, Minister without portfolio in the French Government, and I, Secretary of State, after I had negotiated on behalf of France the agreements for the transfer of skills and the agreements for co-operation, we were sent by General de Gaulle to Dakar to represent him at the ceremony for the proclamation of independence, over which President Léopold Sedar Senghor was to preside.

Thanks to Charles de Gaulle, the decolonization which was taking place was a work of peace carried out peacefully. It had not given rise to the firing of a single shot; it had not caused a single death; instead of relations of dependence, which were not in keeping with the times, it had brought new relations, relations of co-operation in a context of friendship, a lasting friendship which still endures.
Eleven times this process was to take place in that year, 1960, which was the year of Africa. Heads of States which became sovereign that year are with us here today, and I greet them respectfully, with you, Mr President. They are witnesses to the fact that there are things that are much more binding than legal ties. I refer to the bonds of the heart, of mutual trust and friendship.

On the whole, Your Excellencies, your states set an example of the pursuit of peace through justice. Our meeting in Dakar is a sign; your patronage of the Prize, Mr President, is proof; your participation in this ceremony, Your Excellencies, is confirmation - that Africa remains true to the lessons given to the world by the illustrious statesman, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, whose legal adviser I had the honour to be exactly forty years ago.

The great African was a tireless seeker, pilgrim and inspirer of peace.

When, at the end of the last decade, the empire of one of the superpowers collapsed, dragging down in its fall the ideology it had tried to impose on the world by force, one author ventured to predict the end of history, as if the danger of war had ceased to threaten humankind.

Would to Heaven that this had been so!

Alas, less than three years later, there were more people on a war footing than during any operation after the Second World War. Although the United Nations endeavours to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons, states which possessed none have now acquired them, others are bent on developing them, and today there is no doubt a profitable and lethal trade in the weapons of a former superpower. The horizon has not cleared... Conflicts are numerous - conflicts of all kinds. However, they all entail the use of force and contempt for human life, whether they are conflicts between states or conflicts within states.

A discouraging reality cannot be escaped: the difficulty of getting states with minorities to live in peace, and the consequent risks.

Previously, authoritarian regimes managed somehow or other to impose peace by force. Indeed, colonization consisted precisely in subjecting great majorities even to the dominion of a minority. Nowadays, democratic regimes maintain peace with difficulty, if at all. Some minorities bear with the law of the majority with impatience, and go so far as to reject it. Elsewhere, the majority no longer tolerates, or does not readily tolerate, minorities which have become too numerous in its estimation.

This phenomenon, often disastrous, is not peculiar to any one continent. It spares none. Incompatibilities engender inexpiable hatreds, which reveal themselves in bomb attacks, rebellions and blind terrorism, and turn into civil war. They are encountered with their attendant mutual cruelties both in huge states such as the Russian Federation - where they seem inevitable - and in medium-sized and small states.

Potentially conflictual situations are generally legacies of history, which has assembled heterogeneous elements. A history made up of conquests and annexations, population movements, spontaneous or otherwise, religious conversions, partial or forced, partitions imposed, or agreed in ignorance of the territories partitioned. In the past, borders resulted from royal marriages or administrative divisions introduced for the sake of convenience.
In this connection, the borders left after colonization did not always have a very rational basis. They were laid out without sufficient knowledge of the relief, the water supply or the population. It was wisely agreed not to try to rectify them. The Organization of African Unity and then the United Nations were well advised when they proclaimed, as one of the principles of present-day international law, that these borders should be maintained.

Everything has not been settled, for all that. Proclamation of this principle did not in itself put an end to open conflicts already existing. Nor did it prevent latent conflicts from coming to a head. And it did not prevent the creation of conflictual situations, as may be seen in Eastern Europe ... and elsewhere.

Partition has in some cases been the solution to such conflicts – or it has for a time been regarded as a solution, at the risk of giving rise to new causes of tension. It is not always possible; it is not always desirable. The remedy is just as serious as the evil it is supposed to correct when it involves tragic population movements, as under the Stalin regime. It is unrealistic when it gives birth to communities that are not viable whereas the communities to which these populations formerly belonged were so.

Everything is by no means settled by the cessation of war and guerrilla warfare, whatever the cause, the debellatio or the treaty. Just as health cannot be defined solely in negative terms as the absence of disease, peace does not consist solely in the cessation of fighting and refraining from the use of force. Genuine peace is the fruit of the concord of hearts and minds.

Establishing peace in a state with minorities no doubt demands respect for legitimate differences and venerable traditions, besides the application, as far as possible, of the principle of solidarity. It demands far more, however: overcoming differences and making people aware of the natural and necessary forms of solidarity, winning them over to common moral values, inspiring the will to live and abide together - in short, the will to constitute a nation.

A poet of late antiquity, Rutilius Namatianus, paid ancient Rome this highest of tributes, which, to Senegal, a humanistic land, I venture to quote in Latin:

Patriam fecisti diversis de gentibus unam.
“From differing peoples you have made one native land”.

Difficult though it may be - and today it is perhaps more so than ever - the task is not impossible, nonetheless. France is referred to as a typical nation state. Yet, in France the nation did not precede the state; it was the state that made the nation. The Republic completed the work of the kings of France.

Since the institution of the Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, the Jury has, on several occasions, proposed awarding it jointly to leading figures who were responsible for a historic reconciliation, prior to the consolidation of a modern state.

It has done so this time, with unanimous enthusiasm, by awarding the Prize to Mr Fidel V. Ramos, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and to Mr Nur Misuari, Chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front and now Governor of the Muslim Autonomous Region of Mindanao, for the agreement concluded by them on 2 September 1996.
A most highly significant act. It put an end to thirty years of guerrilla warfare which cost two hundred thousand people their lives – an enormous number. Mr Nur Misuari even said that the agreement would remedy a situation whose roots stretched back more than four centuries.

The conflict within Mindanao and the southern islands of the Philippines was of the kind most difficult to quell. The parties involved were separated not merely by conflicting interests, but first and foremost by the most sacred convictions - by religious faith.

All the more credit is due to the architects of peace for reaching an agreement, and for doing so without the need for anyone to renounce their convictions.

They were helped in coming to an agreement - the fact is to be emphasized - by the religious bodies. They were helped by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, within which the President of the Republic of Senegal played a leading role. The mediation of the Conference, it has rightly been reported, was tireless, constructive, and finally crowned with success. The Roman Catholic Church, which has the larger following, approved the agreement and did its utmost to have it accepted by its members. Better still, an interdenominational conference consisting of Christian organizations and Islamic organizations was set up and carried out a campaign in favour of the peace process in the southern Philippines. An admirable and exemplary union of believers seeking peace!

Yes, the Peace Agreement of 2 September 1996 is in every respect a historic agreement. It will remain as one of the great achievements of the highly constructive presidency of Mr Fidel V. Ramos; and Mr Nur Misuari is to be warmly thanked for having chosen negotiation instead of armed conflict - in fact, for having chosen life over death.

The Agreement, which put an end to death-dealing action, was also the prerequisite for solving thorny problems and for the development of the southern Philippines, whose potential is so considerable.

Of course, the Agreement is a start, not a culmination. Agreements have yet to be concluded with other parties. However, it was a precondition for all the rest. It is the example to be followed, the model to be copied.

By its unanimous vote, the Jury, made up of individuals from different continents, sought to convey to Mr President Fidel V. Ramos and Governor Nur Misuari the importance attached by the world to the Agreement of 2 September 1996, and to express its admiration and sympathy to the two architects of peace. It trusts that the seed they have sown together will germinate, put forth shoots, grow and flourish for the peace and well-being of their people.

Thank you.