Honourable Heads of State, 
Mr Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic, 
Honourable Ministers, 
Members of the Jury, 
Your Excellencies, 
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Executive Secretariat of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize was particularly gratified by the decision of the Director-General of UNESCO and the members of the Jury to depart from custom this year and hold the ceremony for the award of the Prize in Dakar, in order to pay tribute to its Patron, President Abdou Diouf. On this exceptional and solemn occasion, before this distinguished assembly, I should like to add my simple contribution to the record.

In June 1991, when I asked President Félix Houphouët-Boigny to honour with his presence the ceremony for the award of the Prize to Nelson Mandela and Frederik De Klerk, on the first occasion of its award, he said to me: “The Jury has just designated two illustrious prize-winners. I am in the evening of my life. I shall designate a patron for the Prize, who will stand by the side of Mandela and De Klerk. My choice was made from the moment that the institution of a prize bearing my name was announced to me. The man I chose has all the qualities to act in my name. He is a man of faith, a defender of peace, a man of his word, who honours his commitments. He will be faithful to my memory when I am no longer here. In agreement with my successor, he will protect the Prize, and he will help you better than I can. He is one of the rare statesmen in the world whom I, Houphouët-Boigny, admire, along with de Gaulle, George Washington and Gandhi. That man is Abdou Diouf.”
The Sage of Yamoussoukro was an excellent judge of character. He was right! I shall never forget the strong emotion that overcame the President of the Republic of Senegal on our first meeting after the death of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny. He reassured and comforted me and urged me to carry on the work entrusted to us by the illustrious departed.

Since then, President Abdou Diouf, mindful of everything concerning the Prize, has received me periodically in Dakar. His wise advice, his guidance, his moral and political support, have made it possible to ensure the credibility and international renown of the Prize.

Mr President, as our ‘griots’ used to sing in connection with Queen Pokou and Lat Dior Diop, you have nobility of heart and mind; you know the meaning of a vow, of honouring a commitment. Your keeping your word, your holding fast to the friendship and memory of the friends who have passed away, are examples for the younger generation and generations to come.

Allow me humbly and simply to say thank you.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

My respectful greetings are addressed to Ms Elisabeth Diouf, whom Félix Houphouët-Boigny called “my daughter”. The extent of his affection for her was equalled only by her exceptional generosity, humility and intelligence, and her discreet and decisive commitment alongside President Abdou Diouf in the building of a Senegal which is just, and in which the poor and disadvantaged have their place, as do faith and the highest moral values. Félix Houphouët-Boigny rightly compared her to Mother Teresa.

Mr President of the Republic of Senegal,

I could not conclude this testimony without mentioning the person who, by virtue of his exceptional qualities as a statesman and a man of peace, is now the living embodiment of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny and has made this Prize his top priority. I refer to President Henri Konan Bédié, your friend and faithful companion in all the struggles for Africa and the cause of peace.

President Henri Konan Bédié has continued and extended the work of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny in all fields, in peace research in particular. He has become the benevolent and attentive Father of the Ivorian nation, creating “progress for all and happiness for each”.

For that matter, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny was in the habit of saying: “My successor will be greater than I; he will accomplish what I cannot accomplish”. Without President Bédié’s unremitting efforts on behalf of the Prize, efforts harmoniously combined with those of the Patron, the Director-General and the Jury, the Prize would not have been assured of enduring status or the international renown desired by President Bédié’s illustrious predecessor.

Mr President of the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire, it is also as a result of your commitment to human fraternity that the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Foundation, and the Prize, will disseminate ever more widely and assertively the message of peace from a
Côte d'Ivoire that is as humane and fraternal as ever, making the pursuit of peace the essential basis of its domestic and foreign policy.

My greetings are also addressed to Ms Henriette Konan Bédié, mother of all the orphans and all the disadvantaged children of Côte d'Ivoire, defender of the poor and of women, who brought to President Bédié her rare humanity, intelligence and will, in the service of Côte d'Ivoire and Africa.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should also like to pay tribute to H.E. Mr El Hadj Omar Bongo, represented here by the Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic.

Mr Vice-President, your presence here today is immensely gratifying to us and gives us cause to persevere in the awarding of the Prize and to perpetuate the memory of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who was full of well-deserved praise for the statesmanship and peacemaking qualities of President Bongo, as also for the long friendship which bound them.

Like Félix Houphouët-Boigny, President Bongo is most certainly a Sage. A man of peace, he has risen to the occasion whenever it was a matter of honouring the memory of the first President of Côte d'Ivoire. Today, he is the guarantor of the political and social stability of the whole of central Africa. The role he played on behalf of peace in this region has made him the depository of Bantu wisdom in the African collective consciousness.

In the footsteps of Houphouët-Boigny, by the side of President Abdou Diouf and President Henri Konan Bédié, he has made peace a justification for his life and his belief in human fellowship. Mr Vice-President of the Gabonese Republic, rest assured that we appreciate President El Hadj Omar Bongo's valuable support of the Prize, symbolized by your presence among us today.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to pay tribute to the action of the representative of the African continent on the Jury, Iba Der Thiam from Senegal.

I take pleasure and pride in Professor Thiam's contribution to the Jury’s discussions, and I want to thank him publicly and to say how much the work he is accomplishing for the promotion of the Prize does honour to Senegal and to its President, the Prize's Patron.

I should like now to pay a well-deserved tribute to a great friend of our continent.

Those in a better position to speak than myself will undoubtedly express themselves on this subject. Allow me, however, as an African, to thank Professor Federico Mayor, Director-General of UNESCO, on behalf of everyone in this room.

He honoured Africa and Black people by creating the Prize which bears the name of the greatest of us all, Félix Houphouët-Boigny.
It was with Mr Mayor that Africa became a priority in all UNESCO's programmes.

His efficient and discreet action in the resolution of many conflicts around the world deserves our admiration. Without the support of Ms María Angeles Menendez de Mayor, without her good sense, appreciated by everyone, Mr Federico Mayor would not have been the exemplary Director-General of UNESCO that he is.

As a result of Mr Mayor's action, UNESCO is today the forum of the world's leading figures and of all those who adhere to the noble ideals of the founders of the Organization.

Mr Mayor, allow me to say on this solemn occasion that your name will go down in history as that of one of the greatest Directors-General of UNESCO.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, I should like to express all our gratitude to President Abdou Diouf and the Government and people of Senegal for their generous hospitality, which has enabled us to pay tribute to our two illustrious prize-winners, President Fidel V. Ramos and Mr Nur Misuari, builders of peace in the Philippines, whom I respectfully salute.

Thank you.