



United Nations
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pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

**Award Ceremony of the
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize
UNESCO, 21 September 2004**

**Address by Dr Mustafa Cerić
Grand Mufti of Bosnia
2003 Prizewinner**

"In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. Praise be to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds¹, Almighty, Provider of Peace and Faith²."

Blessings and Peace be addressed to our Messenger and Prophet Mohammed.

Peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him, his family and his companions.

"Allāh Almighty said to the Prophet Mohammed: O people of the Book, come to that which we all share together that we worship none but Allāh (Alone), and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allāh."³

I am grateful to God Almighty for the blessing of this day, for the joy of this gathering and for this occasion of strengthening the hope for peace in the world.

Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
Mr President Henri Konan Bédié, the Prize's Sponsor,
Mr Abdu al-Wahid Balqiziz, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference,

Mr Adnan Terzić, Prime Minister of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Mr Abdul al-Waziz al-Tuwarjī, Director-General of
the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,

Notes of the Secretariat:

¹. Passage of the *Coran* (v. 1 et 2 – Al-Fâtihah).

². Passage of the *Coran* (sûrat 59, v. 23 – Al-Hashr).

³. Passage of the *Coran* (sûrat 3, v. 64 – Al-Imrân).

NB – The text in italics pronounced in Arabic.

Honorable Ministers,
Mr Vice-President and Members of the Jury,
Mr Alioune Traoré, Executive Secretary of the Prize,
Your Eminences and Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I had thought it natural for men and women to live in peace until the moment when the peace of my country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was broken.

Only then did I realize that peace should not be taken for granted. Men and women should strive for peace as they strive for their very existence, because peace is existence, as the late Martin Luther King used to say: “[...] the choice today is not between violence or non-violence, it is either non-violence or non-existence”.

I regret that I had no opportunity to meet the man who did not wait for peace to come to him, but carried it wherever it was needed. However, I am pleased and proud to receive a peace award that bears his name. He is Honourable Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the late President of Côte d’Ivoire.

An Islamic tradition has it that those who leave behind useful knowledge, lasting charity and good children continue to receive rewards from Almighty God after their death. I believe that Honourable Félix Houphouët-Boigny is a good candidate for continuous rewards because his lasting legacy, we have inherited his knowledge, his righteousness and his students who are searching for peace.

I am, therefore, grateful and deeply honoured to receive the 2003 Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize not because I personally deserve it, but because my Bosnian people had earned it by their dedication to truth, justice, peace and reconciliation.

A thousand years of Bosnian history is rich with examples of tolerance in a unique religious and cultural diversity. Those who are familiar with the history of Bosnia understand what that word “Dobri Bošnjani” means. It means Good Bosnians.

In fact, Good Bosnians are men and women of open mind and good heart. Their identity was shaped by the idea of the inclusive approach to the revealed religions, i.e. the religions of the Book: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It is, then, no surprise that the Good Bosnians had opened their arms in 1942 to receive the Sephardic Jews who had been persecuted from Spain because of their faith. Also, the Good Bosnians did not hesitate in the saving of the “Haggada”, the unique piece of Jewish sacral art which the Sephardic Jews had brought to Sarajevo five hundred years ago.

Unfortunately, the Good Bosnians were not strong enough to save the Ferhadia mosque in Banja Luka or the Old Bridge of Mostar from destruction. And they were betrayed into the genocide in Srebrenica.

The Good Bosnians are a small, but very ancient European people. They have suffered severe persecutions, but have never lost the sense of their goodness and tolerance. From the clay of Bosnia, they have received goodness and from the faith of *Tawhid*, i.e. the belief in One God, they have learned tolerance.

Hence, the Good Bosnians expect from Europe to be as morally and politically responsible for the small nation of Good Bosnians as they are eager to live up to the values of European ideals such as goodness, tolerance, the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

Furthermore, the Good Bosnians wish it to be known that UNESCO was strong and good enough to help the reconstruction of the Old Bridge of Mostar, the opening of which was held last July. They have asked me to convey their deep appreciation and great thanks to Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, for his personal contribution to the reconstruction of the Bosnian cultural heritage.

Your Excellency Mr Matsuura, with your right and strong leadership, UNESCO has become a symbol of hope and reconciliation for all people of Bosnia and Herzegovina and you should be proud of that.

I hope that UNESCO will continue its good work of reconciliation in my country by helping the reconstruction of other Bosnian historical monuments as well, such as the Ferhadia Mosque in Banja Luka.

Also, it is well appreciated that the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia at The Hague continues its determination to find truth, bring justice, thus, help reconciliation in my country.

Eminences and Excellences,
Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to share this award with His Eminence Cardinal Roger Etchegaray. His devotion to peace was demonstrated to me in 1993 when he visited us in Sarajevo and attended the Muslim Friday prayer in the Sarajevo Ghazi Husrevbeğ Mosque in the midst of shelling of the city of Sarajevo. That was the first time that a Cardinal entered the mosque and witnessed the Friday prayer in Sarajevo.

As you can see, Cardinal Etchegaray came to Sarajevo, in 1993, to share with me the fear of war and I came today, in 2004, to Paris to share with him the hope of peace.

Isn't it true, then, that our life is nothing but sharing the fears and hopes of our times?
Isn't it true, then, that our heart is made for sharing the life with others because we share the clay from which we all came and to which we will return once again?

We share the belief in One God who created us from a single soul then scattered us like seeds into countless human beings!

We share the same father Adam and the same mother Eve!

We share the air we breathe and the rise of the Sun we see every day!

We share Abraham's faith and Noah's Ark of salvation!

We share the love for Virgin Maryam (Mary) and the respect for her son Isa (Jesus) (peace be upon Him),

We share the true stories about Moses and his divinely guided people around the Sinai desert!

We share the clear word of the Holy Qur'an and the exemplary life of the Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon Him)!

We share the joy of good tidings and the sorrow of dreadful sounds!

We share the pleasure of our success and the pain of our failure!

We share humanity of our hearts and minds!

We share prayers that ours is the time of the Ethics of Sharing, that would free the humanity from the time of death camps, the gulags, fascism, anti-semitism, the Holocaust, bolshevism, islamophobia, ethnic cleansing, and genocide; and instead lead the humanity towards a decent life, freedom, justice, human rights, democracy and prosperity.

And, finally, we share the moment of truth that our future ought to be in the Ethics of Sharing, not the Logic of Might that breaks the Rights, and not the Practice of Terror that breaks us apart.

We cannot hide the fact that many people are suffering today because of the Might of the big nations against the Right of small nations!

We cannot close our eyes before the fact that many people are persecuted today because the historical responsibility has been replaced by the historical Myth!

We cannot but share the concern about the fact that many people are deprived of their basic human rights because the strong moral commitment is replaced by the poor political compromise!

We cannot but wonder about the fact the Jesus' love for the neighbour is replaced by the revenge against one's neighbourhood. We believe that the Holy Land that Muslims, Christians and Jews share ought to be the place of the Holy Peace, not the Holy War!

And, of course, we cannot but regret the fact that the argument of Muhammad's justice has not been applied to a meaningful relationship among peoples!

And, finally, we cannot but say that no one has the monopoly on pain; no one has the monopoly on morality; and no one has the monopoly on war and peace.

But, everyone has the responsibility to work for peace because it is the only way for our salvation. So, we should know by now that we shall either all live in peace or none will live in peace.

Eminences and Excellences,
Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I accept the 2003 Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize in the hope to carry out the message to my fellow Muslims around the world that the theory of conspiracy is not helping the Muslims resolve their problems of tyranny, poverty, illiteracy and fear in the world. The faith of Islam is made neither for isolation nor for assimilation, but for the cooperation and competition in good deeds. It should be clear to all of us that neither the meek, nor the aggressive will inherit the Earth, but the cooperative, i.e. those who understand that our future lies in the Ethics of sharing, not in the Chaos of those of tearing apart.

But equally important is the message that I would like to pass on to our friends around the world: that Islam is the religion of peace, that Muslims are peaceful human beings who like freedom and prosperity like any other nation. Our friends should know by now that the false accusations against the Muslim Holy Book, the Muslim Holy Prophets from Adam through Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon Him) do not resolve the problems of promiscuity, drugs, Aids, pornography, pedophilia, the hate-crimes and homicide in

the world. The solutions for these and other evils of our times lie in our cooperation in the name of God who loves us in good deeds for humanity.

Eminences and Excellencies,
Brothers and Sisters,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank the members of the Jury of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize for honouring my people, my country and myself with this Peace Prize. My special thanks goes to the President of the Jury, Dr Henry Kissinger.

Of course, my gratitude would be greater if peace prevailed in Palestine, Iraq, Kashmir, Darfor, Chechnya, etc. I sincerely pray to Almighty God to give us the courage to work honestly for peace and prosperity for the whole humanity.

Also, I would like to thank the staff members of the Secretariat of the Peace Prize, and in particular, Mr Alioune Traoré. It was a very happy moment of my life to know Mr Traoré and I would like to thank him and his staff for an excellent preparation for this ceremony. I would like to say that UNESCO should be proud of their work.

I am grateful to my Bosnian friends who came from Bosnia especially for this occasion with the Prime Minister Adnan Terzić as well as to all Bosnians who live in Paris and Europe and who are here to share our common hope that the future will be better than our past.

Especially, I would like to express my thanks to Mr Jakob Finci, the President of the Jewish Community and the President of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina for honouring us with his presence.

I am pleased by the presence of the representatives of the Catholic Church. I use this opportunity to send my warm greetings to His Holiness the Pope John Paul II and to express our support to His Holiness' efforts for the peace in the world.

Also, my thanks go to my brothers from the Muslim world, especially His Highness Prince Turkey al Faisal from Saudi Arabia and my friends from around the world for being by my side on this great occasion in the life of the Muslim people of Europe.

Having said that, I would like you to join me in a Bosnian prayer:

We pray to Thee, Almighty God
May grief become hope
May revenge become justice
May mothers' tears become prayer
That Srebrenica never happen again
To no one and nowhere

Our God
Do not let success deceive us
Nor failure takes us to despair!
Always remind us that failure is a temptation
That precedes success!

Our God
Teach us that tolerance is the highest degree of power
And the desire for revenge
The first sign of weakness!

Our God
If you deprive us of our property,
Give us hope!
If you grant us with success,
Give us also the will to overcome defeat!
If you take from us the blessing of health,
Provide us with the blessing of faith!

Our God
If we sin against people,
Give us the strength of apology!
And if people sin against us,
Give us the strength of forgiveness!

Our God
If we forget Thee,
Do not forget us!
Amen!