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

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

Honourable guests,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to greet and thank all those who have been so good as to be with us this afternoon at UNESCO Headquarters and to grace with their presence this celebration of peace.

The ceremony that brings us together this year is a tribute to two eminent persons who speak to our consciences, two spiritual and religious guides of the European continent unanimously respected for their campaign for peace and human solidarity: Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, emeritus President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Dr Mustafa Ceri , Grand Mufti of Bosnia.

Before continuing, I am happy to introduce the members of the Jury who have been able to join us today: Mr Mário Soares, Mr Jean Foyer, Mr Iba Der Thiam, Mr Andreas Adahl, and the Protector of the Prize, President Henri Konan Bédié.

Allow me also to mention the presence in this room of:

- Ms Nomasanto-Maria Sibanda-Thusi, representing the President of the South African Republic;
- Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference;
- Mr Pierre Messmer, former French Prime Minister;
- Mr Jean-Claude Gaudin, former Minister, Vice-President of the French Senate, Mayor of Marseille;

- Mr Pierre Mazeaud, President of the French *Conseil Constitutionnel*;
- Mr Alassane Dramane Ouattara, former Prime Minister of Côte d'Ivoire under President Félix Houphouët-Boigny;
- Dr Abdulaziz Othmam Altwaijri, Director-General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO);
- Mr Mongi Bousnina, Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO);
- Mr Michel Albert, President of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*;
- Mr Paul Cluzel, Permanent Secretary of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*.

I cannot bring this list to a close without thanking the heads of the various religious denominations in France, Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina who have joined us today.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

President Abdou Diouf, Patron of the Prize, is on mission abroad. His obligations at the head of the International Organization of the Francophonie prevent him from being with us today. He asked me to convey his apologies to this illustrious assembly, and to the two prizewinners the expression of his very high esteem and warm congratulations. President Diouf also asked me to renew publicly here the expression of his deep gratitude to the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, for his tireless action on behalf of the African continent and the renown of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the midst of the difficulties besetting the modern world, the Jury, as its Vice-President, Mr Jean Foyer, will shortly explain, was anxious to send the international community a strong reminder of the equal dignity of all religions and of the fact that, by joining forces, all of them with leaders such as Cardinal Roger Etchegaray and the Grand Mufti Mustafa Ceri , can and must play an essential role in peace-making and the mutual appreciation of civilizations.

It is fitting here to condemn all those who use or manipulate any religions as militant ideologies for shameful political objectives. Religions, as you know, have as their mission to guide the moral conscience of humanity and light the way towards universal peace, peace in the hearts and minds of humanity.

In these solemn moments when I think of peace in hearts and minds, my thoughts turn to just one man, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny .

He secured freedom of religion and conscience in his country, where he succeeded in establishing not only interdenominational dialogue, but also respectful collaboration and mutual assistance.

Indeed, the Sage of Africa considered that religions have a historic responsibility in the peace-building and peace-keeping at national and international levels. It was for this reason that he built the Abidjan Cathedral, the Yamoussoukro Basilica and more than a hundred mosques in his country.

Before dying, he mentioned to me one of his last projects, which he did not have time to carry out: to build a synagogue facing the Basilica and the Great Mosque of Yamoussoukro.

More than dialogue, he thought that fruitful and sincere cooperation between different faiths ó cooperation based on tolerance, respect and love of one's neighbour ó was essential to underpin the peace and human solidarity of which he was the tireless apostle.

In a moment, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny will address this illustrious assembly and remind us of the great project¹, still as relevant as ever, which he had designed for his people.

Lastly, I am glad that the award ceremony of the Prize that bears his name has, with the passing of the years, become an occasion for meetings and exchanges for all ó whether persons with political responsibilities, defenders of human rights or religious dignitaries ó who are willing to work for the advent of a world reconciled with peace in the service of human happiness.

Thank you.

¹ Extract from a speech by the first President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire at the fortieth anniversary of the foundation of Rassemblement démocratique africain (RDA), Yamoussoukro, 1986.

õIt is our desire that the decision-makers of peace and war be shown clearly how to achieve peace: how to destroy the citadel of suspicion that makes any peaceful solution impossible. Our combat is not over, it will never be over. The real combat, the combat for peace, is still going on.õ