

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

Director-General  
of the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the ceremony for the presentation  
of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize 2004

Mr President Henri Konan Bédié, Patron of the Prize,  
Mr President of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina,  
Ministers,  
Mr President of the General Conference,  
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Mr Vice-President and Members of the Jury,  
Distinguished Prizewinners,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome you here to UNESCO on the occasion of the presentation of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize to the Grand Mufti of Bosnia, Dr Mustapha Cerić, and to Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President Emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, to both of whom I extend most respectful greetings.

I should also like to welcome the members of the jury of the Prize and their President, Dr Henry Kissinger, who is unable to be here with us today owing to prior commitments. Dr Kissinger has asked me to express his regret to the prizewinners and to congratulate them on his behalf.

Lastly, I should like, if I may, to thank the following persons for having joined us on the occasion of this ceremony:

President Henri Konan Bédié, Patron of the Prize, who, as in previous years, has made a point of honouring us with his presence. I should like to express to him UNESCO's gratitude for his efforts made over many years in order to ensure wider publicity for the Prize and its long-term future;

Mr Kofi Sama, Prime Minister of Togo;

Mr Adnan Tersiç, President of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing the President of Bosnia and Herzegovina;

Mr Xavier Darcos, Minister of State for Cooperation, Development and the French-speaking Countries, representing the President of the French Republic, Mr Jacques Chirac;

Mr Boaventura Cardoso, Minister of Culture of Angola, representing the President of the Republic of Angola, Mr Eduardo Dos Santos;

Finally, I should also like to address my most respectful greetings to the widow of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who has been so good as to honour us with her presence today.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The prizewinners we are honouring today have distinguished themselves by their work in favour of concord, dialogue and reconciliation. Their unflagging commitment to the cause of peace has earned them the respect and admiration of all men and women of good will.

You, Dr Mustafa Cerić, never stopped calling for dialogue and negotiation during the terrible siege of Sarajevo. In your capacity as spiritual guide to the Muslim community of Bosnia and Herzegovina you spared no effort to resolve the conflict which inflicted such hardships on the Bosnian people. Since the return of peace to the Balkans, you have missed no opportunity to disseminate in international forums your philosophy of tolerance, dialogue among religions and respect for others.

Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, you too are a fervent builder of peace. Appointed by His Holiness Pope John Paul II as President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 1984, you have dedicated your efforts at the head of the Council to promoting respect for human rights and social justice.

As a trusted collaborator of the Holy Father, it was at his request that, during this period, you took up your pilgrim's staff to try and put out the fires of discord in the world. From Mozambique to Rwanda, from Bosnia to Iraq, from Viet Nam to South Africa, you visited every region in crisis on behalf of the Pope, on each occasion bringing words of peace and discreet, but effective, mediation between the belligerents.

Gentlemen, it is in people like you that humanity places its hope for a more peaceful and more fraternal world.

All religions convey the hope of universal peace and call upon us to remember that we are all fellow human beings. That is the ideal you have both placed at the heart of your action.

The values you have courageously defended in the service of peace and of human beings are the very same as those that inspired the founders of UNESCO when it was first established.

It is therefore with pleasure and with pride that I welcome you to UNESCO to award to you both the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize which you so fully deserve.

Thank you for your attention.