



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

**Award Ceremony of the  
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize  
UNESCO, 2 October 2008**

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

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasant duty to draw your attention to the presence of the following distinguished figures, among others, at this ceremony:

- Mr Jusuf Kalla, Vice-President of the Republic of Indonesia,
- Mr Filippe Savadogo, Minister of Culture, Tourism and Communication and Special Envoy of the President of Burkina Faso,
- Ms Teija Tiilikainen, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, representing the Government of the Republic of Finland,
- Professor Mario Bettati, Special Adviser on European Affairs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, representing the French Government,
- Mr Javier Pérez de Cuellar, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, member of the International Commission for Peace Research of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Prize,
- Mr Philippe Séguin, First President of the French Court of Auditors,
- Mr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, Director-General of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization,
- Mr Mongi Bousnina, Director-General of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.

We are also pleased to announce the presence of two large delegations from the Houphouëtist parties in Côte d'Ivoire, namely a delegation including the former Prime Minister, Charles Konan Banny, and led by President Henri Konan Bédié, and a delegation of the Rassemblement des Républicains, of the former Prime Minister, Alassane Ouattara, led by its Secretary-General, Ms Henriette Diabaté.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a special pleasure for me to welcome Mr Martti Ahtisaari, our prizewinner, and pay my humble respects to his wife, Eeva Ahtisaari, who has accompanied him to receive the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize.

President Ahtisaari, you are following in the footsteps of Nelson Mandela and Frederick De Klerk in coming to this rostrum. It was here that the whole world saw them shake hands for the first time on an international rostrum before they received the Nobel Peace Prize a few months later.

It was subsequently the turn of Arafat, Rabin and Peres to sit where you are sitting today.

In other words, Mr President, from this moment your name will be listed together with those of the great peace-builders of our time.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr Ahtisaari has devoted his whole life to resolving the most complex conflicts in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the Balkans and Northern Ireland.

For 35 years he has felt the call to build peace and reconciliation in the world. He bears an unqualified message of hope, humanism and brotherhood which has enabled him to resolve apparently insuperable conflicts. He has had recourse to no army to impose peace, nor has he brandished any economic sanctions, his only weapon being dialogue.

Mr President, your action against war and violence and your perseverance in resolving all conflicts through dialogue are wholly and centrally consistent with the philosophy and political thinking of President Félix Houphouët-Boigny who, in 1970, said in an address to the diplomatic corps at a meeting in Abidjan: "When seeking peace, genuine peace, a just and lasting peace, we must not hesitate for a single moment to have recourse persistently to dialogue." President Ahtisaari, you have proved that you, too, hold this belief and, for that reason, you are being honoured today.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to take the opportunity afforded by this ceremony to reiterate my profound gratitude to the man who, from the outset, was a tireless architect of this Prize at President Félix Houphouët-Boigny's side and who has continued to watch over it, true to his promise to the Sage of Africa. That man is President Abdou Diouf, Sponsor of the Prize.

I also convey thanks and acknowledgements to the Patron of the Prize, President Henri Konan Bédié, who has travelled specially from Abidjan in this pre-election period to demonstrate once again his commitment to the Prize, to Félix Houphouët-Boigny and to his immortal work.

At this juncture I must also thank the President and members of the Jury, who, through their reputations, their great experience of world affairs and the relevance of their choices, have established the international credibility of the Prize and have raised it to a level consonant with the noble ideals of UNESCO's founders.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me now to turn to the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura.

Mr Director-General,

In consolidating the tasks assigned to us by UNESCO's founders, you have given absolute priority to the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize. In 2004, you finally completed the peace research arrangements desired by President Félix Houphouët-Boigny by establishing, within the Secretariat of the Prize, a high-level International Commission for Peace Research, chaired by Dr Kissinger. Owing to the action that you have taken, the Commission has become a think-tank on peace and dialogue among civilizations and thus plays a key role in supporting the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize.

Mr Director-General, you have respected the complete independence of the Jury's choices and positions. In other words, Mr Matsuura, the success of the Prize, whose numerous winners have subsequently received the Nobel Peace Prize, redounds first and foremost to you. I therefore wish, on this rostrum, to pay to you the heartfelt tribute that you deserve.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to thank and acknowledge everyone who has made the effort to join us here today, in particular the President of the General Conference and the Chairman and Members of the Executive Board.

I should also like to say, as an African, how proud we are of the work of Mr Olabiyi Babalola Yaï at the head of the Executive Board, which, on behalf of our continent, he has been chairing intelligently, wisely, clear-sightedly and very competently.

Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this solemn moment, I am moved to think of the great Sage of Africa, President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and, with your leave, I pass on to Mr Martti Ahtisaari the message that he repeated to me continually during his lifetime: “Our struggle is not over; it will never be over. The real struggle continues and it is a struggle for peace.”

Thank you.