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

**Address by Mr Martti Ahtisaari
Former President of the Republic of Finland
2007 Prizewinner**

Honorable Colleagues,
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my gratitude to the International Jury of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, led by Dr Henry Kissinger, for the great honor of being the recipient of this distinguished Prize “for a lifetime contribution to world peace”.

The origins of my career as a peace mediator can be found from my childhood years. I was born in the city of Viipuri, then still part of Finland. We lost Viipuri when the Soviet Union attacked my country. Along with 400 000 fellow Karelians, I became an eternally displaced person in the rest of Finland. With my mother, I moved from one household to another before settling in the Eastern part of Finland, in the city of Kuopio. This experience, which millions of people around the world have gone through, provided me with sensitivity, which explains my desire to advance peace and thus help others who have gone through similar experiences as I did. This background led me to work in and with the United Nations where I have served under five Secretary-Generals of the United Nations over a period of 30 years. During these years, my career has been intertwined with development issues and peacemaking.

Because of my background as a Karelian Finn, I recognize both the challenges and the opportunities of peace. It is not that long ago that Europe was in a full-scale war and it is good to remind ourselves about the value and the importance of peace. My country has done remarkably well since the Second World War but we should never take peace for granted – as we have seen in our own continent.

I am very privileged to have been born in a Nordic country. My country Finland has provided me with values and skills that only few societies do: our educational system is one of the best in the world and our society is based on democracy and gender equality. I wish to acknowledge the role of the United Nations and UNESCO in advancing these values.

Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My career in peace mediation begun in Namibia where I helped the country to become independent. My United Nation's Namibia involvement lasted 13 years, from 1977 to 1990. This experience has had an important influence in my work. Both my wife and I are proud Honorary Citizens of Namibia and the country has a special place for both of us. I am thankful for the presence here today of former Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. Your role was crucial in bringing Namibia's independence struggle to a successful end in 1990. You fully supported me as your Special Representative during a difficult road to Namibia's independence. I am thankful for the possibility you gave me to work under your leadership.

The independence process of Namibia is a good example on how the international community can act at its best in conflict resolution.

Very early on, it became clear that at independence, one of the most daunting challenges would be the lack of trained manpower, trained Namibians, competent to take in their hands the reins of political power and administration of the country. In order to respond to this need specially tailored training courses were organized by various United Nations organizations, including UNESCO, within the framework of a United Nations Institute for Namibia and the Nationhood Programme for Namibia.

United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) led a process that ended when Namibia became independent. This operation included both the traditional peacekeeping force and a civilian component dealing with electoral, police, human rights and educational matters. Namibians can be proud on what they have achieved already, but many challenges remain. I am thankful for Africa for giving me my first chance.

When later on I was dealing with the problems in the Balkans region, I very often wanted to get back to Africa and work with the gentle men and gentle ladies of Africa. What impressed me most during my Africa years was the capability of Africans to forgive. Unfortunately I have not witnessed the same attitude in Europe.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The United Nations is the most important "peace-making" body – there is no real alternative. It can gather the combined "influence" and "persuasion and pressure" of a large number of Member States. It has also an ability to support and legitimize the engagement of regional actors and organizations.

However, I believe we are all aware of the constraints of the United Nations and of the tendency of the Member States to give it demanding assignments without providing adequate resources and political support. Therefore, regional security organizations are vital. Regional arrangements, such as the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) complement and support the United Nations' capacity. Furthermore, it is extremely important that not only the European or transatlantic regional organizations are active in peace and security cooperation, but

also organizations such as the African Union are looking for a more active role in peacekeeping and peace support operations and increasing their capacity to act.

When talking about peace mediation of internal conflicts, it is evident that the very principle of sovereignty is at stake. Governments of war-torn societies are often reluctant to “internationalize” their internal disputes and conflicts. This means that involvement of the United Nations in conflict resolution or crisis management in the case of these internal conflicts is being considered cautiously and critically by the governments.

Therefore resolving and preventing conflicts, a conventional, purely state-centric approach might not be an option in all cases. Sometimes we have to be ready to challenge our conventional way of doing business. Non-governmental actors can play a pivotal role as facilitators or mediators of a peace process. I have been asked many times how should mediation be pursued; what are the methodologies and techniques that are needed. I believe there is no precise answer. However, I see mediation more of as “art” rather than an established practice. The reason for this might lie partly in the immense complexity in brokering international conflicts. My experience so far is that every conflict is a *sui generis* – a special case.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The creation of the African Union in 2002 has been an important milestone towards the development of meaningful collective security architecture among African Member States and regional mechanisms. The African Union has been instrumental in establishing a security management system that includes the Peace and Security Council with its supporting mechanisms. The African Union has brought about a significant improvement in the ability of the continent to promote stability, anticipate and prevent conflicts, promote and facilitate peace processes, and support post-conflict reconstruction activities. It has also improved the coordination and harmonization of regional efforts aimed at the prevention and management of conflicts.

With the foundation of the African Union and contribution of some key individuals, such as former Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Africa is entering into a new era of conflict resolution and peace mediation. The implementation of the recent agreements reached in Kenya and Zimbabwe should be fully supported by the European Union. The successful solution of these conflicts is a clear indication that Africa can deal with African problems herself and without outsiders, like myself. I am extremely pleased with this development.

I am seriously concerned about the large number of conflicts that the international community has not solved. We should never accept that some conflicts remain frozen forever. All conflicts can be solved. Each conflict is to be seen as a vital challenge requiring immediate attention from the international community. Conflicts in the Middle East, Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Burma/Myanmar, Somalia and Darfur are affecting the credibility of the international community. These conflicts have led to widespread devastation and regional instability, as well as large numbers of refugees. The international community remains unable to prevent the outbreak of war and the scope of action of many organizations is confined to limiting the negative effects of violence. We all know that solving these conflicts is central. The credibility of the international community is badly eroded because we have allowed these conflicts to become frozen and not tried seriously enough to solve them.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace can never be achieved by one single person. It is part of the media culture that the mediator gets an unreasonable share of attention during the mediation process. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the role of others, members of the mediation teams and the most important actors outside the direct negotiation process itself. In my work with the UN, the OSCE and the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), I have always been in a privileged position to build up my own team. It is vital that a mediator is given the opportunity to choose the people he or she is working with and this should be better taken into account particularly at the United Nations. I am particularly happy to see some of my colleagues with whom I have worked attending this ceremony today. Over the years, you have become part of my extended family. Without your efforts, I would not be here today.

Furthermore, the role of the supporters should never be underestimated. For instance, the Aceh peace process, a track II exercise, would have not been possible without a firm support from the United Nations Secretary-General, the European Union and other Governments.

I would like to use this opportunity to recognize the presence here today of Vice-President Jusuf Kalla from Indonesia. Without your determination to look for peaceful settlement of the Aceh question, we would not have succeeded. We still have work to do. I do hope that good cooperation initiated between the Indonesian Government, Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) countries and EU could still be relied on in monitoring the forthcoming elections in Aceh in April next year. The peaceful progress in Aceh is in all our interest.

It is now time to thank those closest to me. I want to thank my wife and my son for their support. There is a familiar saying that behind every successful man, there is an even more competent woman – my family is not an exception to this rule. I have for 40 years enjoyed the support and constructive criticism from my family. It has been very important.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the great challenges for today's world is how to combine in every society individual responsibility of citizens with necessary solidarity and support from the community they live in. In an era of globalization, adherence to traditional sovereignty and individual state solutions, have failed to produce peace and prosperity. In a transnational world, international cooperation is essential to give States the means to meet the most fundamental demands of sovereignty. We must chart a new course for today's greatest challenges and opportunities. For that traditional or sovereign democracy is not an answer. The answer is responsible democracy.

I thank you.