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**Award Ceremony of the
Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize
UNESCO, 3 February 1992**

**Address by Mr Frederik W. De Klerk
President of the Republic of South Africa
Co-Prizewinner**

Mr Director-General,

It is fitting that this first joint award of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize should acknowledge the signal efforts made by South Africans of all races and political convictions to bring about peaceful constitutional change in their country. Our aim is to eliminate discrimination in all its forms and to promote political and social justice, and economic prosperity to the fullest extent possible.

I should like, at the outset, to pay tribute to one of the great African statesmen of our time: President Félix Houphouët-Boigny after whom this award has been named. He has advocated, over many years, dialogue as an instrument of peace. At times he was a voice in the wilderness, but today we are encouraged by the extent to which his wise counsel has prevailed. We in South Africa are similarly dedicated to this approach of peaceful dialogue, discussion and negotiation and sincerely trust that we shall succeed in laying the foundations of a new nation of which all our citizens may be proud.

Conflicts, whether regional or global, have many origins and frequently reach so far into history that the antagonists have forgotten, or no longer care about the initial causes. In many countries and regions, conflict and strife seem to have become a way of life. We, in South Africa, have decided to break out of the web of conflict and strife and to reach out to reconciliation and restructuring, to a new and better way of life.

In this, we find ourselves in step with the international community and its awareness of the dangers of conflict and violence. The world of today, as we in South Africa, seems to stand on the threshold of a breakthrough to peace and reconciliation.

Recent events have again reminded us pertinently of the terrible danger of conflict, of the fact that the nuclear arsenals of the world are capable of destroying the greater part of life on this planet. This presents us with one of our greatest challenges: to ensure the survival, not only of mankind, but also of the whole environment.

Also in this wider context South Africa is prepared to play its part in ensuring peace and in warding off the threat of destruction and extortion. By signing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and a Safeguards Agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency, we have demonstrated our determination in this regard. We look forward to the whole of the southern African region being a zone free of nuclear weapons, as part of interregional co-operation for the development of the entire subcontinent.

For South Africa, much more than for the two of us as individuals, today's award is of great significance.

The international community, it is true, has a duty to encourage the peaceful resolution of regional and national disputes. It has already conferred on the United Nations a significant role in fostering world peace and is considering adding to those responsibilities in the future.

However, while any moves to achieve these aims deserve encouragement, it has to be remembered that it is, in the last resort, not the international community, but the disputing parties themselves who have to resolve their conflicts and live with the results of their decision. Accordingly, an important limitation is enshrined in the United Nations Charter explicitly prohibiting any positive encouragement from becoming interference.

Mr Director-General,

South Africa has received a welter of negative publicity in the past for earlier attempts to come to terms with its widely varied ethnic composition. You know as well as I do, how strong the international criticism of these attempts has been, for UNESCO has been in the forefront of the campaign. In fact, South Africa's marked divergence from the direction taken by your Organization, led to its withdrawal in the mid-1950s.

It is, therefore, particularly symbolic that the first presentation of an award made to South Africa under the auspices of a member of the United Nations family, should be made through UNESCO. The fact that it is a shared award reflects the international recognition being accorded the new direction that most South Africans have embarked upon together. It will serve as profound encouragement to all of us who are navigating uncharted waters to the destination of a South Africa of which all the citizens are proud.

As is so often the case with reforms, obstacles of fear and suspicion have to be overcome to reach the democratic ideal. In this, South Africa is no exception.

Ideally, the ongoing process of constitutional adaptation should take place in an atmosphere of peace, respect and trust. Nevertheless, there are always those that do not wish to accept one another and that resort to violence to achieve their ends. We dare not condone the methods of these groups. Anarchy and chaos cannot be tolerated in any civilized country anywhere.

The vast majority of South Africans are in favour of a process of peaceful and constructive negotiation leading to the adoption of a new, fair and just constitution. This has been demonstrated clearly by the participation of most of the significant South African political leaders in the Convention for a Democratic South Africa, which met for the first time last December.

The challenges facing the architects of the new South Africa are enormous. We have to reconcile the concept of democracy – within an undivided State – with the realities of diverse cultures, races, languages and history. For generations, many believed this was impossible. I am aware of the difficulties on the road ahead, but I am also convinced that the leaders of our country will overcome these difficulties in the unique process of peaceful negotiation that has begun in South Africa.

The irreversibility of the current initiatives is no longer in question. The good faith of the South African Government has been demonstrated beyond doubt. It has levelled the playing field for everybody and removed pillars of statutory discrimination that still inhibited the process of peaceful negotiation.

Much remains to be done, but we are undoubtedly and inexorably moving towards a new constitution which will include all South Africans in a just and equitable manner.

I should like to believe that our friends here today and all those who wish South Africa well, will allow South Africans to proceed with their negotiations unhindered in an atmosphere of reconciliation. The old stereotypes concerning South Africa no longer apply. What we need now is a positive attitude of general encouragement for the process on which we have embarked.

Notwithstanding the progress we have already made in the constitutional field, we face a tremendous challenge of socio-economic development and upliftment, aggravated by factors such as rapid population growth and urbanization. All this is placing enormous demands on our available resources.

While we have considerable technical and other resources needed to meet future challenges, the immediate need is quite clearly for economic involvement in South Africa, if we are to generate the required jobs, skills, education and services to build a prosperous future for all our people. We have noted with appreciation the interest expressed in this regard by many and give the assurance that we will continue to create a favourable climate for investment.

Mr Director-General,

I am sharing this platform with my compatriot, Mr Nelson Mandela. We have arrived at this point along very different routes, but our presence here together does, in a very real sense, demonstrate our real desire and that of most other South Africans to overcome our differences and embrace the future together in a new, just, reconciled and fully democratic South Africa.

I stand here, not only as an individual, but also as a representative of many other courageous South African leaders – real democrats like Dr Buthelezi and many others – who have joined hands in their quest for peace and justice.

It is in this spirit and on behalf of all my countrymen who are working tirelessly towards this goal that I am, in all humility, honoured to accept this prestigious award in the knowledge that there are many of my countrymen who deserve to be so honoured.

In the same spirit I intend to donate my part of the award to a cause in keeping with the ethos and purpose of the Prize.

I thank you.