

SPEECH BY JACQUES CHIRAC

**The Award Ceremony for the Fondation Chirac's Conflict
Prevention Prize
The Grand AMPHITHEATRE - Sorbonne**

fondation
Chirac



agir au service de la paix

Mr Secretary General,

Dear Kofi Annan,

Ministers,

The Rector of the Academy of Paris, Members of the Jury,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Our world is facing serious upheavals.

The current economic and financial crisis heightens risks and exacerbates imbalances and inequalities. While its consequences are cruel for the most fragile segments of rich countries, they are dramatic for the poorest countries.

The food crisis, which currently affects one sixth of the world's population, sadly highlights the fact that hundreds of millions of men, women and children are mired in a misery that is unworthy of the human condition.

Today, despite an increase in global wealth, poverty is omnipresent.

It is at our doors, at our neighbour's, and particularly in Africa.

The G-20, led by the President of the French Republic, in an unprecedented cooperative effort, is trying to find answers worthy of the stakes involved. Other threats however persist and are sometimes worsening. The seeds of potential conflicts are germinating everywhere:

- Exacerbated or negated identities,
- Unequal access to water, food, and energy resources,
- Loss of meaning and cohesion in societies.

And yet, the international community, giving in to a feeling of powerlessness and sometimes to cynicism, adapts to open or latent conflicts, obvious or hidden injustices. In short, it has renounced.

Yes, to quote the well known saying, our world is great and terrible.


Great in all the promises it holds, terrible in all its scourges. First among the latter is War. War breeds all forms of poverty. Not only wars between peoples but also civil wars add dishonour and self-destruction to the violence.

I believe in the primacy of law over might. I believe in the virtue of dialogue. I believe in Humanity.

War is never a solution. Anything capable of eradicating its roots from the heart of our societies deserves our support and must become our first priority.

We must detect the embers of hate wherever they may smoulder and help those who can put them out, those who know how to clear misunderstandings, those who generate reconciliation before it is too late.

For all of these reasons, I wanted my Fondation to create a Prize for Conflict Prevention.



For war is not a phenomenon of the past. If Europe learned, after such barbarity, to live in peace for the past sixty years, let us not forget that war was crouched at our doorsteps not so long ago. Barely ten years ago, the Balkans were a hotspot.

The inherent risk of our global existence is to turn local conflicts into universal threats.

The world has become one, for better or for worse. In such a context "there are no little quarrels" as Amadou Hampaté Bâ said.

History has taught us that each major economic crisis increases the risk of destabilising the political realm and fanning latent conflicts.

Even if States have reacted more quickly and more efficiently than during the great Depression of the 1930s, the current financial crisis will leave its mark. The human toll is already high. Fragile equilibria are already disrupted.

The years to come carry great risks. We must be lucid and draw the appropriate conclusions in order to act.

This concerns us all and we must be even more vigilant.

I know the part you played dear Kofi ANNAN in furthering debate on conflict prevention amongst UN authorities, to define concepts and procedures such as continuous monitoring, early warning, mediation, and conciliation. Everywhere, regional organisations became more involved as did the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie, headed by our friend, President Abdou Diouf.

We are grateful to all those who, in the name of States and international organisations, without ever being deterred by the difficulties, patiently try to appease internal or external tensions and to eliminate sources of possible conflicts.

However, peace efforts also need commitments of a larger nature.

More than ever, we need peace activists issued from civil society. Political action certainly needs vision and perspective; however it also needs to be relayed.

It needs purveyors.

It needs compassionate, intelligent men and women who, in contempt of prejudices, take risks for themselves and their loved ones.

They blaze new paths, ignoring the lazy logic of fatality.

The Fondation Chirac wants to honour these scouts, these sentinels with its Prize. In just a few moments, we will be discerning the very first recipients

They embody hope. They fight against evil. They give hope a chance.

They prove that the best is possible.


They show that we can change the world.

They do it quietly...

... through example.

They demonstrate the force of non-violence.

They ground their efforts in dialogue and listening.



They use the simplest means: the strength of the spoken word and an outstretched hand.

The desire to live together that is so dear to our friend Andrea Riccardi.

It is only fair to recognize their efforts, to encourage them, to raise awareness of their efforts.

Because their patient work represents another form of diplomacy.

By serving human communities, they give credence to a form of action that Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela and so many others have used to further peace and reconciliation between men: a policy of "weak force".

Peace is not a subject reserved for international conferences. Peace is sometimes as humble as a shared meal. It is built slowly in the hearts of men and women.

Is such a method infallible? Certainly not for we are in a field where personal interests, cruelty and intransigence are intertwined.

It is nevertheless a precious contribution to a civilisation which, at the beginning of the 21st century, is discovering its weaknesses.

Today, as we award the Fondation's Prize for Conflict Prevention, we are also saluting this exemplary contribution to building a better world.

I would like to thank the experts and jury members that have accompanied us throughout the process of selecting the recipients.

I would also like to thank Mr. Naguib Sawiris for his support.

Finally, I would like to thank the Rector, Patrick Gérard, for welcoming us here in this temple of culture and civilisation, the Sorbonne.

The Special Jury Prize is awarded to Doctor PARK Jae Kyu, former Korean minister of reunification, untiring craftsman of dialogue with North Korea who opened the way to the reconciliation of the populations.

The *Conflict Prevention Prize* is awarded to Imam Mohammed Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye. Formerly, both were adversaries in a hostile antagonism, before questioning their use of violence and consecrating themselves to the reconciliation of the hearts and minds in a Nigeria rife with religious and ethnic fractures.

The dialogue they have instituted for the past few years continues to offer results and guide us.

We are indebted to the example of all three.

Allow me finally in these particular circumstances to pay my respectful homage to the great Claude Lévi Strauss, whose entire work was dedicated to showing that all civilisations deserved equal respect.

We are also inspired by his teachings.

Thank you.