



H.E. HOUPHOUËT – BOIGNY  
President of the Republic of Ivory Coast  
Address 13

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*Here we are, free and independent, contemplating the use of our newfound independence. The primary objective of African independence must be the attainment of unity and the total liberation of the continent. African unity is not only a dream shared by all Africans but also a vital aspect of the continent's future. The President Boigny acknowledges that numerous obstacles must be overcome before achieving this unity, indicating that its development will be challenging yet essential, captivating, and invigorating. He asserts that the most effective path to both unity and complete decolonization lies in fostering prosperity through the meaningful cooperation and integration of African economies. Intensifying this cooperation is a prerequisite for political unity, and therefore, the conference should prioritize economic coordination, as economic unity presents the strongest foundation for achieving political unity.*

*Questions for consideration: Why does President Boigny believe that cooperation and economic integration are prerequisites for political unity? What specific objections for political unity are listed in the President Boigny's Speech? What does President Boigny mean when he said that "certain newspapers will tomorrow bear the headline: African Conferences follow one another and are all alike"? What does Boigny mean when he said that "let us act in such a way that history will likewise consecrate the memory of the day of the 22nd of May, the month of flowers at Addis Ababa, which means 'The New Flower', the day on which the new Africa was launched, Africa united, fraternally united"? What does Boigny mean when he said that "Here we are, free and independent, what are we going to do with our independence"? What does Boigny mean when he said that "let us above all make it our first concern to apply the Charter honestly"? If African leaders pledge to achieve unity, but they fail to achieve unity, what will they have proven to the world, to Sub-Saharan Africans and their posterity? What does it mean for a group of citizens or a group of countries to be independent and united?*

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In Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, May 1963

Your Imperial Majesty

Mr. President Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Having followed with growing interest the statements of my illustrious colleagues, I wondered as I came to this rostrum, whether it would not be extremely reasonable on my part to make the shortest speech of my whole political career, saying to you quite simply and frankly, in all friendship and in all confidence, and that in one single phrase: have nothing to add, all has been said, and so well said, except that I must affirm to you that I am entirely in agreement with you on adoption in its entirety the common Charter of United Africa at the end of this moving debate - so moving and so rich in instruction. But know that you would not be in agreement with me if I acted that fashion. So, in my turn, I should like first of all to be allowed to express to our host, His Majesty the Emperor Haile Selassie I, the feelings of gratitude awakened in us by his initiative in convening in Addis Ababa a Conference that is most certainly destined to mark an important date in the history of this continent.

We cannot doubt that the future will acknowledge the merit and the decisive role of that man who made himself the interpreter of the aspirations of all the African peoples to unity, and who, identifying himself with the course of events, was the first to succeed in bringing together all those bearing responsibility for this continent, thus allowing them to lay the foundation of their common destiny. Here we have a positive action in the cause of peace; of which Africans, who traditionally attach a very special importance to discussion, are perhaps more conscious than others peace on this continent first, to the extent that this Conference is going to encourage the confrontation of doctrines and methods that are certainly more parallel than opposed, and to attempt to retain only that which can serve to unite us more closely. But peace in the world as well - for it's as a fact that the establishment, consolidation and spreading wide areas of tranquility can only aid powerfully in diminishing the risks of friction and in lessening international tension.

We are likewise conscious of having within our grasp a chance of progress and should almost be tempted to say a chance of survival for African in this modern world the hardness of which — sometimes necessary, but always redoubtable and restrictive - we know well. And if there is a lesson to be derived here and now from the more or less recent independence of our countries, is it not that of the discrepancy that appears between the natural aspiration of our peoples to happiness and the virtual impossibility of satisfying that aspiration within the too restricted and very often artificial limits of our frontiers. Whether we wish it or not, the organization of the modern world based upon the existence of several large

groupings, and to hope that separately we shall find the key to our problems is to condemn ourselves not only to stagnation but also to slow asphyxia. I find it particularly significant that this first inter-African Conference - anxious to achieve unity, to facilitate the liberation of the whole continent, to consolidate peace and define the framework and means of progress of this continent — should hold its meetings in the capital of a state which, thanks to the lucidity and untamed will of its head, and thanks also to the uncompromising patriotism of a nation to which the people of the Ivory Coast expresses its profound admiration and brotherly and affectionate greetings, was able to resist victoriously foreign conquest thus preserving the independence of several thousand years. Who amongst us, indeed, did not follow with passionate interest, at that impotently, the apparently unequal contest sustained by the valiant Ethiopian people? Who amongst us does not recall having heard with pride and hope the announcement of the ultimate success of this country, finally supported by the great democracies, against the totalitarian forces, although they were then at the height of their power?

Since then, Africa has not ceased to pay very special attention to the unceasing efforts of Ethiopia to promote African unity, to the economic development of this dear country and to the steady raising of the standard of living of its inhabitants, the fruits of the labour of a people and of foreign cooperation without discrimination. Such Summit is the country which today lends our meeting the prestige of a glorious history and sets for our desires for unity, the example of a syncretism that unites, without mixing them up, some of the most essential ingredient of the African patrimony. I should like to take advantage of this historic and opportune occasion to convey likewise to all the Heads of State here assembled the brotherly greetings of the people the Ivory Coast, which has always followed their victorious struggle for the total liberation of their countries from all of servitude and their unceasing efforts for the progress of the populations that have given them their confidence, not only with interest but with affection as well. These populations will be eternally grateful to them for having rehabilitated the African man by the restoration of his pride and human dignity.

And in conveying these greetings, I am all the more anxious to make manifest to the Heads of State my satisfaction that at last we have come together and that this meeting constitutes in itself a positive contribution to the unity of our continent, so much desired by all, by permitting to get to know one another and to exchange ideas upon our common development. What are you going to do now that you are 20? Is a question that it is customary to ask an adolescent when he has reached that important stage in life. Here we are, free and independent, what are we going to do with our independence? We have come to Addis Ababa to seek the answer together. To begin with, two preoccupations, two grave preoccupations, hold our attention:

- first, to achieve unity, the primary and essential condition for our survival as a free and independent continent;
- secondly, to liberate all Africa from the colonial yoke.

This latter preoccupation is truly the major anxiety of all responsible Africans, as we are unanimous in recognition that there will be neither effective neutrality, nor peace, nor unity, nor happiness in Africa as long as others among our brethren continue to groan in the chains of slavery. And in this connection, the solemn undertaking to which my country will subscribe in the struggle for the complete liberation of our continent - and undertaking that will be honoured, you may all rest assured - deserves an explanation from us, so that nobody may be misled as to its exact significance. We know about the long, difficult, but peaceful struggle that numerous friends amongst you have conducted, as we have ourselves, for the liberation of our respective countries; we know our almost morbid hostility to violence, our passionate devotion to negotiation for the settlement of all differences, the pressing representations that we have made during our visits abroad and in the course of the numerous contacts that we have been accorded, so that an end be made of foreign occupation in Africa.

Confronted, however, by the unspeakable conduct of the rulers of Portugal, by their systematic and irresponsible refusal to put a stop to the tragic tale, by the inhuman sufferings inflicted by this country on our brethren in their struggle for liberty - that prime necessity of mankind - the heroic resistance of the Angolans, without arms or resources, and of so many other brothers whose tale of martyrdom is an affront to our own liberty, a threat and indeed even a negation of our own independence, we solemnly declare that our country, overcoming the scruples of devotion to negotiation, has requested us to seek, in concern with yourselves, the most practical means of putting an end to the criminal obstinacy of Portugal, to foreign occupation in Africa, and to the apartheid that is held in honour in South Africa - that apartheid which is the great shame of our continent.

Thus, the attention of the men in power in those countries, and that of their real friends, is called unequivocally both to our unanimous and unshakeable will to do all within our power to help our oppressed brethren to recover in their turn their independence and dignity, and at the same time to the risks that the anachronistic situation upon which we have dwelt entail for peace in this part of the world. Must we accordingly await the complete liberation of Africa in order to lay the foundations of the unification of our continent, the dream of yesterday, the reality without doubt of the near future, the justification for the very existence and hopes of all responsible Africans. The union of those who are already free, who know the intoxicating joy of liberty, can contribute efficaciously to the liberation of our still oppressed brethren.

I shall not persist there in developing more than necessary the reasons that militate in favour of unity, compelling do they appear to us, as they derive both from aspirations founded on affection that are common to our peoples, and also from the laws which rule the world around us. It appears obvious, in fact, that the irresistible pressure of technology must lead to the constitution of economically powerful geographical groups, which will take the place of the partition of the past: that is a fact, the major fact of the present epoch, which compels our recognition and which it is not in our power to alter. In reality, we have only the choice between participating in the modern world as a solidly constructed group, and therefore as a respected partner, and standing aside from the main economic stream, which would restrict us, probably for all time, to the role of supernumerary, a role which some people already tend only too often to assign to us. We are too conscious of the impatience of the men who sent us here as their representatives, and of their thirst for greater well-being, too conscious also of the historic nature of what is at stake at this Conference not to set our steps resolutely on the road to unity. Its construction will be difficult, essential, enthralling and intoxicating, all at the same time.

We should be doing ourselves an injustice if we doubted for a single instant the deliberate will of our illustrious colleagues gathered here, or if we doubted their acute consciousness of the obstacles that await us on the path of unity, a difficult path, but a path that offers salvation for all of us. Some of our colleagues have stressed here and now with force and conviction the necessity of telling each other the truth as is fitting between the brothers that we are. That is the task to which I would address myself in my turn. Having always had a horror of the sterile polemics and ill-founded, subjective accusations that divide us, I should like to say to you in all good faith, that if we venture to emphasize, before and after so many other, the difficulties that face us, this is in no way with the idea of evading our responsibilities or putting a brake on the infectious enthusiasm which we are experiencing together on this blessed day, but on the contrary with the determination to bear them constantly in mind, so as to have a healthy appreciation of the errors to avoid, to measure judiciously the ingredients of wisdom, active patience, courage and realism essential to the success of this immense and grandiose undertaking.

Our common victory, difficult but certain, will be all the more precious in that we shall be able to seek together in brotherly comradeship the means adequate to overcome the difficulties inherent in this exceptional human achievement. Indeed, the convergence of reasons of many different kinds - a theme that we shall develop later — combined with the affective but powerful inclination that impels the African peoples to achieve their unity, should, it seems, enable them to surmount all difficulties and overcome all obstacles. That is what we think, in fact, and our presence here has no other justification. But we are also

conscious of the fatal error that we should commit in letting ourselves be carried away by enthusiasm and in underestimating the difficulties by attempting to pass through the necessary stages too rapidly.

Words of disillusionment? Certainly not . . . Words of realism, rather, as we cannot doubt that there are certain kinds of wild optimism that led straight to disenchantment. It is enough for us to turn our attention to the attempts at unification that are at present emerging in outline in the world to be led to exercise essential but constructive caution. On the one hand, we have nations which left behind them several decades ago, the historical phase of nationalism, and which conceive their unity as being the culmination of long and delicate process. On the other hand, we find countries that are neighbours, that have a community of language, religion, economy and ideology, that share an equal desire to achieve their unity, that are nevertheless led by an accurate appreciation of certain realities to renounce the idea of immediate fusion and to provide for transitional forms of association in order to reach their goal.

We must, therefore, be clearly aware that if the union of Africa constitutes for a new aspiration the same sentiment has inspired other peoples before us - peoples whose experiences cannot be disregarded, but which must be on the contrary, be carefully analyzed. We cannot fail to recognize, first of all, the obstacle constituted in our case by the scarcity of human contacts that the rulers of this continent maintain between themselves. And it is already a first positive result of this Conference that we are breaking without isolation and enjoying the opportunity for personal exchanges on the model of those exchanges which the greatest leaders of the world and the Heads of State of other continents try to establish between each other. It has been said that frontiers are the scars of history. The magicians of plastic surgery, which certain persons would like to claim they are, will employ their supposed extraordinary talents in vain; they will not succeed so soon in effacing these scars from the surface of the earth. That operation is not indispensable to the achievement of the unity with which we are concerned.

Although we may hope that different nationalisms will rapidly lose their sharp outlines, it is impossible for us to disregard their present existence, sometimes indeed in the exacerbated forms which the struggle against colonialism has obliged them to assume. Furthermore, it is scarcely possible for us legitimately to disregard the difficulties of a linguistic nature, and all those other difficulties which, in a general way, result from the underdevelopment of this continent and from the various temptations, both personal and collective, which are its deplorable ransom. Even the desire of certain ideological bloc to draw Africa into their sphere of influence, and there to project their antagonism, must be emphasized and considered as an important factor promoting division. It therefore seems to us that our ardent quest for unity must be matched by the greatest discretion, and at the same time by the will to proceed by progressive stages, applying positive solutions to concrete problems, and leaving it to what I will call the

"dynamism of unity" to settle later on those questions which may still divide us today. Here and now, it appears to us possible to enumerate the principles that should inspire our efforts.

The unity that we seek Should not be confused with uniformity which implies first of all that every country must have the opportunity industrious masses, who thus pursue their aimless existence in destitution, which is the inevitable consequence of such troubles — factors of political and governmental instability and of insecurity. We should like to believe, moreover, that we, as responsible leaders, will condemn with firmness any resort to practices which dishonour their authors. Yes, we wish to believe it, because this frame of mind and these methods appear to us foreign to Africa, and because we also consider that improved well-being for the people constitutes for each of us a sufficiently inspiring and absorbing task to preclude our being tempted to pursue dreams of hegemony abroad, which we intend to leave to other continents or other epochs. We would hope, furthermore, that the solution of such differences as may arise between certain brother states would be sought by means of peaceful negotiations. What is at stake is the harmonious development of this continent, which could not countenance the use of other methods, the value of the message of human peace and brotherhood, which Africa means to convey to a world that needs it sorely, is also at stake.

Whatever may be the extent of the difficulties, some of which we have mentioned, everything militates in favour of unity. The salvation of all of us and the future of our well-beloved Africa depend on our unity alone. Freedom, peace and happiness — do not represent the ultimate goal of our common policy? We are all agreed in recognizing that the development of Africa can only be achieved in a climate of peace. It is also necessary for Africa to eliminate all internal elements of discord, so as to be able to stand aside from the competition in which the two rival ideological blocs are engaged, and to ensure that they do not succeed in transposing their rivalry to this continent. We believe that Africa will be better able to win respect for its true neutrality by manifesting a complete unity of views, thus proving itself capable of negotiating on a footing of equality with the different blocs, which would otherwise be tempted to link their assistance with political conditions such as would drive the isolated African States to choose between committing themselves — and indeed between accepting ideological subjection — and the withdrawal of essential foreign aid.

Hence the absolute necessity of achieving peace in Africa, total peace, indivisible peace, the foundation of true neutrality. Yes, peace between ourselves, peace with other continents, those are the essential prerequisites of true neutrality: that neutrality which we aspire, as it alone will enable us to catch up with the long period we have lagged behind on the road of progress. I am quite ready to concede that a conflagration would not directly concern our continent, at least in the early stages, and also to the extent

it had chosen and won the chance of keeping to strict neutrality. But could anyone seriously believe that in the age in which we are living, and in a world the different parts of which are so closely complementary, and of which the dimensions have been so extraordinarily contracted by technology, could anyone seriously believe that a world dispute would not concern in the long run, even if indirectly, and would not bring in its trail consequences that are easily imagined for the development, if not the very existence, of our states? And is it not clear that the behaviour of the world powers would be perceptibly transformed as soon as they ceased to have interlocutors a mosaic of states having relatively negligible importance, and as soon as they were dealing with an entity of more than two hundred million men, with a united continent having at its considerable natural resources essential to those world powers, continent proclaiming aloud its right to peace that is to say, to progress.

Although the reasons that lead us to aspire to unity are political, they are also of an economic character. For if it is true that the great world groupings have the appearance of political or ideological blocs, do they not, in the last resort, cloak economic realities? Are not the most solid and stable of union those which are based upon a community and a coincidence of material interests which very often appear as the prelude to the imperceptible harmony of policies and then to political unity? Because it appears to us that economic unity constitutes the best possible approach to political unity, because within the framework of the modern organization of world markets, it is becoming more and more essential for Africa to appear in the guise of a coherent whole, because ideological struggles can for the most part be reduced to fundamental divergence on the manner in which the utilization and distribution of material resources are conceived, because the total liberation of African man now appertains, on the economic plane, to the increase of his purchasing power, we cannot remain insensible to the advantages that coordination, as a prelude to the much desired unification, would contribute to our progress in that domain.

Our Conference should turn its attention in particular to that economic coordination which everyone agreed in recognizing as a vital necessity, and as the essential and indispensable support I might even affirm, the primary conditions — our unity. Whether we are dealing with agricultural or animal production, or the disposal of such product, or with the industrialization of our countries, or with trade, or with line of communication, with transport or with telecommunications, coordination proves to be necessary. Our work must culminate in the definition of the framework and means of that coordination, and of the essential stages on the road, leaving to our economic experts the task of progressively fillings in the frame, the frame of our future economic community, in the overriding interest of united Africa. If it is, in fact, true that our difficulties are essentially a result of the delays that have accumulated in our



economic development, we shall only succeed in accomplishing our total liberation and in basing our unity on solid and modern foundations, to the extent that we tackle the real obstacles, and to the extent that together we find the solution to our main problem — that of the poor standard of living of the African people. We have said, in fact, that political unions were generally preceded by economic communities: so it is necessary for us to be able to pool our prosperity, so true is it that destitution can only engender hate and discord.

*Our unity will thus in no way exclude outside cooperation,*

On the contrary, and this cooperation will be all the more fruitful and confident, for being established on a basis of equality and of respect for all the interests represented. I do not, moreover, consider it unprofitable to remind you of the necessity for an African culture, a harmonious synthesis of cultures coming from different continents enriched by the contribution of our common patrimony, defined yesterday so excellently by our colleague and friend, our great poet, President Leopold Senghor, when he called it "African-ness." We are, in fact, convinced that no true progress will be made on the road to the unity of our continent if we cannot dismiss fanaticism from our speech and actions, so as to open the way of fruitful exchanges between men, and in particular between young people coming from the most varied horizons, thus allowing the establishment of bonds of friendships, the comparison of different experiences and realities, a reciprocal enrichment designed to develop the feeling of jointly belonging to one and the same culture: African culture. Africa awaits from the Conference of Addis Ababa reply to its impatient expectations: unity. From attentive study of the respective Charters of the two so-called groups, the Casablanca and Monrovia Groups, there emerges a common desire to crown the ardent hopes of our brother Africans: the unity of our continent.

When each one of us has explained precisely and with the most complete frankness the manner in which he conceives African unity, has formulated his reservations, stressed the mistakes to be avoided and the difficulties to be surmounted, and nevertheless induced acceptance of the necessity for and advantages of that unity which we so much desire, let us at last put to shame the many people who seize every opportunity to stigmatize what they consider the chronic and congenital trouble of the Africans: an immoderate taste for palaver. Certain newspapers will tomorrow bear the headline: "African Conferences follow one another and are all alike."

A lot of speeches, very fine speeches indeed, in Africa everything is song, symphony and poetry, resolutions, piles of resolutions, but no decisions at all. Agreed as we are on the goal, are we going to continue our discussions endlessly, to tear each other to pieces on the choice of means, thus ruining Africa's chance of Unity, a chance that is greater than that of all the other continents, and to prove our

inveterate critics right by the same token? No. The moving admonition of His Majesty the Emperor of Ethiopia confronting us with our responsibilities, must be taken seriously very seriously — into consideration. Yes, history will condemn us implacably if the Conference of Addis Ababa, which has aroused so much hope in Africa and so much interest in the world, should end in pious hopes. We remember a certain night — the 4th of August.

Let us act in such a way that history will likewise consecrate the memory of the day of the 22nd May, the month of flowers at Addis Ababa, which means "The New Flower", the day on which the new Africa was launched, Africa united, fraternally united. To bring this about, let us adopt before we separate, in unanimity and by acclamation, the draft Charter on which our responsible Ministers are working at this moment in the spirit that has emerged from our debates, simple Charter which is flexible, and which consecrates the fusion of our groups on the altar of African unity, a framework to be progressively filled in, a framework the contents of which I do not require to deal with further, as it has been so eloquently defined by certain speakers preceding me on this rostrum.

Yes, let us adopt it. But let us above all make it our first concern to apply the Charter honestly. Only then will the dawn of that unity, to which we aspire with all our being arise, only then - vindicating the poet's words - "une teinte inedite peuplera l'arc-en-ciel" ("an unknown tint will pervade the rainbow"). Then Africa's voice will be heard, propounding a new humanism to the world, a humanism characterized by fraternity and the sense of solidarity, that special quality that has belonged to Africa throughout the millennia, that message which Africa's present circumstances have not yet allowed to prevail.