

National Conference of the Vital Forces of the Nation

From February 19th to 28th, 1990

Basic Documents

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Foreword

From February 19th to 28th, the National Conference of the Vital Forces of the Nation was held at the Aledjo Hotel PLM in Cotonou.

The Conference was convened in immediate accord with the joint decision made on December 6th and 7th, 1989 by the special session of the Central Committee of the Party of the People's Revolution of Benin, the Standing Committee of the National Revolutionary Assembly, and of the National Executive Council.

The objective of this conference, which has brought together a veritable cross section of representatives of all the Vital Forces of the Nation, regardless of their political sensitivities, is to find effective and peaceful solutions to the political and social crises that have paralyzed the country for months.

For nine days nearly 500 Beninese representatives coming from throughout the country and even overseas have tried and found, thanks to

honest and direct interchange, the ways and means to create a much needed framework in Benin for the establishment of a body of law where the rights of man and each citizen will be respected. In addition, the attendees proposed durable and reliable institutions that will insure a more moral and clean political system.

During this conference of national reconciliation the symbol of the pierced jar of king Guezo has regained its authentic meaning. This conference is unprecedented in Africa, perhaps in the world. In its nine day course love for the homeland has conquered the old feelings of personal egoism, egocentricity, and individualism. The acute sense of duty to the country has taken precedence over discouragement, anxiety, and other prejudicial difficulties, and allowed for a culmination and pathway toward a national consensus acceptable to all. The conclusions truly honor Benin, and make of its one time title "the sick child of Africa" only a memory left behind.

It is true, there have been many threats to stop the work of the conference; the anxieties of so many have caused confusion and cast doubt in many minds. However, thankfully, these things have been overcome thanks to the deep faith of a few, and the desire to succeed for all of our Beninese people.

To mark this event of national pride, the National Office of Newspaper Publishing, Advertising and Printing (ONEPI), and the press have recorded as a whole in this document the major decisions made, and actions undertaken throughout this historic conference.

Gisèle ADISSODA

"Uniting our efforts to build our common Homeland"

Address by Mr. Robert Dossou, Chairman of the National Preparatory Committee of the National Conference)

The story follows its course, including both painful moments and moments of sweetness as well.

Mr. President of the Republic,

Presidents,

Madam and Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen, and all ambassadors and representatives of International Organizations,

It is a great moment of magnanimity that gathers us this morning.

During the coming week we have to honestly discuss our ideas on the future of our country. We've come from various philosophical and even geographical horizons: some people have only had to cross a bridge to be here, others have traveled the length of our country, and still others have even crossed oceans and seas.

Nonetheless, no matter the diversity of our sensitivities and perspectives we are all here, united in the belief and the determination that we can together build our common homeland.

Each will have to give up a little of himself to concede to the other. Each will have to reduce any subjective expansion of its "me," so that the collective interest prevails. Everyone will be required to refrain from thinking that only his ideas, his projection of what the society needs is the only decisive and exclusive factor for our common salvation.

As well, we would like to believe that by coming to this room, each has left outside the door and in the locker room any sense of exclusivity, animosity, resentment, or any spirit of intolerance behind - - I am, in fact, convinced of that; and in the name of the National Preparatory Committee, I welcome you all warmly.

For those who come from abroad, near and far, I welcome you particularly.

As for you who have set foot once more on the soil of your homeland after a long absence, we say to you: Welcome back in your home in the peace of heart and of spirit!

Mr. President of the Republic,

Thank you for giving us the honor, on the 22nd of December, 1989, of serving on the National Preparatory Committee of the Conference, and for assigning our various tasks. I would like to say, on behalf of the whole National Preparatory Committee, 'mission accomplished,' Mr. President of the Republic.

And what a mission! - Exciting and delicate. But we have accomplished it with great dedication and enthusiasm. Despite that there may be some shortcomings in our work, we ask your indulgence and that of the lecturers.

We look toward the realization of genuine satisfaction in the success of the conference.

Long live the Democratic renewal,

I thank you.

GENERAL REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE

(submitted by *Mr. Albert TEVOEDJRE, General Rapporteur*)

As everyone knows by now, as a result of the joint session of the central organs of the State on December 6th and 7th, 1989, a decision was made to liberate the country from the ideology of Marxism-Leninism; also, to bring a separation of party and the State; to create a new government structure; and to convene a National Conference of the Vital Forces of the Country. The current Conference, now ending, represents the application of this decision of December 7th, 1989.

We wish immediately to express our very deep appreciation to the Preparatory Committee, to its Chairman, Minister Robert Dossou, to his Vice-president, Minister Pancrace Brathier, and to each of its members. We are delighted by all of their work, which amply justifies all of their efforts, their commitment, and determination.

This Conference is being attended by almost five hundred participants, coming from the most diverse backgrounds (peasants, workers of all kinds, executives of the administration, political parties and sensibilities, development associations, non-governmental organizations, representatives of cults, not forgetting the personalities who exercised on the national or international level functions of first plan). This exceptional meeting has been greatly amplified by the national and international press and particularly by the organs of broadcasting and television which have accomplished an extraordinary work thus allowing the entire people to participate in the event. The hundreds of messages of encouragement and congratulations from everywhere, inside and outside of the country clearly show the historic significance of this Conference. Add the fact that the President of the Republic has been a regular participant in the meeting he

has solemnly opened and with which he has been in contact at every moment of its duration.

It is under your chairmanship, Bishop Isidore de Souza, that this Conference is being held. With us, you have entered into the decisive History of this country. On behalf of your faith, of your deep availability for this people, you have led our work with a competence that is without equal, with a impartiality never taken in default, and with a patience that you alone were capable of. The full conference has unanimously asked me to thank you and give you our most sincere and fraternal wishes for the success of your noble mission in the midst of us.

Now, Ladies and gentlemen, what about the general atmosphere of our work? Which major problems have been raised? Which capital decisions can be adopted? Which vision do we now have of our own destiny?

"If thou can see the work of thy life destroyed
And without losing a moment to rebuild it,
Thou shalt be a man my Son..."

Any careful observer of your work these last few days will have felt with a deep intensity that a Nation or a People immersed in the night, was bracing suddenly around the same raft, or the same chain, using its last chance of survival - broke its bonds and was freed! It went out into freedom with its face radiating in tears and blood, perhaps unrecognizable, but definitely alive.

You expect therefore that I shall tell you in this report about how the thorn bites felt, but no, I tell you especially of the flowers together amassed. The first beautiful wreath is the National Conference itself. No one could believe it. Each of us here has expressed, or shared our doubts and fears, and even the certainty that this was a trap, one of the many traps that the powers in difficulty readily imagine in order to resume their breath and

continue their grip on the subjugated peoples. And yet, here suddenly, everything this country is in its profound, significant reality has become a General Assembly of the Nation. Here, men and women who may not have known each other, some of which hated each other, whose interests were opposed, whose suffering excluded each other, were found together shouting all their hope for days and nights. They come from Toukountouna or Savalou, Avrankou or from Comè, the participants in this Conference have all taken the measure of the event in its creation, and in the History that they were called to shape. And so you are all in agreement, I think, for what I say on your behalf to all. The first realization of your General Rapporteur is from President Mathieu Kérékou, who took the initiative for this gathering and has certainly obeyed the economic and social constraints but also has, in every way, been the architect of a major event: the birth of a new Republic. Mr. President of the Republic, the entire nation is grateful to you for this act of political courage. This first finding that we must raise is based on a second need; that of the underlying reasons for our gathering. Who does not remember the sad story of a young Abel, who we even have been reminded here? Who does not remember that since that time, mankind has kept valuable in it the lesson that founded our resurrection?

THE EYE OF THE CONSCIENCE

Remember, when with his children dressed in skins of wild beasts,
frenzied, livid in the middle of the storms
Cain fled from before Jehovah
As the evening fell, the dark man came
At the bottom of a mountain in a big plain
His wife tired and his sons out of breath said to him:
"Let us lay on the earth and fall asleep".
Cain not sleeping, dreamed at the foot of the mounts

Having lifted up his head, in the depth of the darkness
He saw an eye wide open
That stared at him in the shadow".
Cain tried everything, he walked thirty days, he walked thirty nights
He sought a safe haven: the seacoasts, the tents in the desert,
A barrier of bronze, a huge and superhuman city
Surrounded by towers where was carved on the door:
"God is forbidden to enter".
The eye did not yet disappear.
Then the unfortunate Cain believed he had found the solution;
"I want to live under the earth
As a lonely man in his sepulcher
Nothing will see me anymore, I shall not see nothing".
A pit therefore was made and Cain said: "It is good!"
Then he went down alone under this dark ceiling
When he was sitting on his chair in the shade
And that on his forehead closed over him underground,
The eye was in the tomb and was watching Cain".

The eye of the Conscience, forgive me that I mentioned it to summarize the path of your argument, of an argument without flaw that you built in thirty years of experience, patience, and of various mistakes.

You said and I recall: "Money can no longer be our master". Turning therefore our back on our history and geography, our arts, our skill, we refused our growth from our own being and our own resources. Preferring the now of some to the "mediocre situation of everyone, we have chosen to extend occasionally the small circle of the privileged and continue to stifle the energies of the greater number. The money that has become our master dictates all our extravagances, all our weaknesses, all our abuse. Because of the money that we need at any cost, we are in danger of not having an authentic culture, freedom, respect, and family anymore.

Verrès and Cartilina are everywhere looming and there is no more Cicero to denounce the scandals that accumulate. Nero, more arrogant than ever, has settled, which also means the time of the martyrs ... We therefore became murderers of our own values. Abel having disappeared, we could no longer sleep. The eye is lit in our night of disgrace and has led us to the Conference of the Vital Forces of the Nation.

You said Ladies and Gentlemen, and I recall, the power can no longer be confiscated by the few in order to crush the others. Oh, certainly any society needs to organize itself around a few basic ideas. It has to equip itself with leaders to guide it and serve the public interest. But we learned at our expense that any power delivered to them was used in a crazy way. We learned that "the authority that is based reason such as, if you command your people to throw themselves into the sea, it will amount to a revolution". But because this wrong power easily tempted us, because we hung on to it at any cost, because without it we are empty, to ourselves we have not been spared: all kinds of violence, torture, murders confessed or not... so long as we are sure that we are alone on board and that we rule. We have forgotten that "He who reigns in heaven and under whom are all the empires, to him alone belongs the glory, the majesty, the independence; is also the only one who is glorified in enforcing the law to Kings, and gives them when it pleases him great and terrible lessons ... It is thus that he instructs the princes, not only by speech and words, but also by effects and examples". Again, the eye of conscience is lit and is chasing us in the tomb of our tests. You will forgive me for not recalling in every detail the suffering that you have described at length - From the children in the streets to the women becoming our possessions while they are our mothers and our references to genuine values, the workers without pay and therefore without consideration and future. You will forgive me for not recalling this in more detail because you have said it so well and that each of us has had his heart shattered and spirit troubled to the point that we decided to

transform ourselves into a General Assembly of the Nation, to proclaim without ambiguity the sovereignty of our gathering and the enforceability of our decisions. Why this revolution? This revolution is based on the truth, "the truth which aroused the more humble front visited by his love, a serene audacity to all tests." The truth is that we had pain. A people who has pain and who feels it is a people on the way to salvation, because, "Only that which hurts, hurts very much, takes the whole man, and accelerates the process of irruption of the spirit in him ".

You expect therefore that I remind you here of your essential decisions with regard to the direction of the affairs of the State. First of all, you now want a State of law in which the power is in service to the people. You want that the authority be refocused in its essential meaning "Auctoritas" to take care of others that they may grow.

FOR A GENUINE RULE OF LAW

You want a State of Law in which the executive power, the legislative power, and the judiciary power are clearly separated. And you want a free and responsible press. You also want associative movements, dynamic cooperatives, and goods-producers to express themselves and flourish. You want men and women of this country to have the absolute and inalienable right to develop intelligence at the center of their life. And of course you have wanted to take the word of a contemporary philosopher: "When intelligence deserts the forum, mediocrity is installed and everything ends up under a dictatorship". The intelligence and imagination are in power, and you have resolved to make these now the axis of our social and political organization. You want the basic freedoms to be guaranteed for all and that no one assumes the right to wrongly use another and to put him on his knees. Our people have suffered in our history the tragedy of slavery and of the servile status. It is therefore by tragic ignorance of history that

today with the help of specialists who have proved their worth, negroes are torturing and killing other negroes. It is by tragic ignorance of history that governments independently organize the dispersal of their peoples throughout the world, making the state of the refugee at least abnormal, and much worse, at this very time, in this universe of violence and hatred.

Our decisions in the political field are many. The reports, motions and resolutions will all be typed out and published in a timely manner in their entirety. But you want that I also remind you of the essential; we have decided to change. We will have a new Constitution to submit to a popular referendum in the coming months. This Constitution will devote itself to a totally democratic system toward development based on work, freedom and solidarity. In regard to this Constitution and the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for January and February 1991, a structure of transition has been put into place. Under your authority as Head of State, Mr. President Mathieu Kérékou, a government will be installed, headed by a prime minister. We have unanimously appointed Mr. Nicéphore Soglo.

Dear Mr. Nicéphore Soglo, if the President of the Republic is willing to accept the conclusions of our work, you will be, within a few days, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Government of our country. The Beninese people, through my voice and through their authentic representatives gathered here, send you their confidence and loving and determined support. In this period of economic turbulence and structural adjustment, we know that the vessel is in very good hands.

To regulate the domestic operations which will be undertaken in these next few months, we have hereby established a High Council of the Republic, whose mandate is the following:

- Monitor the follow-up of the decisions of the National Conference;
- Exercise the legislative function, particularly in budgetary matters;

- Control the executive;
- Study the amendments which are received after the popularization of the preliminary draft of the Constitution;
- Supervise the parliamentary and presidential elections, as well as the regulation of electoral disputes;
- Approve the preliminary draft of the Constitution;
- Ensure equitable access for political parties to the mass-official media and ensure compliance with professional ethics in regard to information;
- In case of the vacancy of power, designate within its borders and according to the case a member to ensure the role of interim President of the Republic or of the Prime Minister;
- Ensure the defense and promotion of human rights as they are proclaimed and guaranteed in the African Charter of Human Rights and Peoples.

A commission on drafting the next Constitution is being designated, whose work we will release in the next few weeks. Our friend, Professor Maurice Glèlè Ahanhanzo, legal adviser of the UNESCO has kindly accepted the task to ensure it personally. Finally, a timetable both flexible and precise will enable the installation of the new institutions by the date of March 1st, 1991.

We have chosen to rehabilitate and respect ourselves. Among your other essential conclusions let me assure you with regard to the question of the armed forces. Here, I am not going to reveal a State secret, but I appeal to the remembrance of Presidents Hubert Maga and Justin Ahomadégbé when we undertook to negotiate the terms of our independence: At that time General De Gaulle declared, during a pathetic meeting with our future

Heads of state, how he, a military man, perceived the future of our institutions. He held the greatest doubts about the way in which we might use our armed forces. On this point, you've addressed it already, reflection must be continued. Fortunately, the people responsible for our military structures have come to a decision which makes them the heralds of a new dawn in the third world. In deciding freely to withdraw from the management of public affairs, by making the choice of a democratic way of life, our army just set an example which will resound far and wide, throughout the entire continent. Our report will be recorded formally.

We have stated it: power, authority, and government are in service to the nation - But service for whose benefit and with what resources? Your general rapporteur has affirmed the essential idea that this service is for more than any one person, but rather, the people at the center of development; the people at the heart of economic growth and of sharing goods. At the same time, we must know how to define our overall development, which includes mastering our cultural environment, and the resources and techniques for the care of our people's health, both physical and mental.

Our country, Benin, is crossing a financial and economic crisis of exceptional gravity. Are there any remedies for it? The answer to this question coming out of this National Conference was unambiguous: despite its heavy handicaps, this country is rich in potential; this country can solve its economic problems. How? You have, with regard to this topic, emphasized very concrete realities. These realities dictate the observation that our domestic wealth is based on our agriculture and commerce; that Benin is one of the countries on the African Continent which can ensure the food self-sufficiency of its whole population as well as food export to neighboring countries, including Nigeria; not only the rice which comes from elsewhere, but also maize, cassava, and yam, cultivated among us as well as our fishery products. Already in the interior of this country, by

observing our markets, seeing the traffic on our roads, noting the construction projects undertaken in our cities by various individualities, in brief, making a sound study of the money spent by ourselves in the national territory, it appears that a divorce exists between the structures of the State and its means on one hand, and the structures of the autonomous communities with their own resources on the other hand.

For this hiatus to be corrected there is one point we must first address: a different behavior of the leaders with regard to money. This is not to say: That anyone is claiming, "I have billions"; this has little to do with our country or its leadership. On the other hand, a behavior of frugality and solidarity is an example that our people are looking for, an example which will have for sure a multiplier effect. It is from here that the change can take place. Look at our structures which represent values, our churches, our temples, our mosques. These structures are not rich, undoubtedly, they do not have billions, but because we deeply believe that they are at our service, as they join us in our deep worries. Without these values-based faiths, something essential in us would be broken or destroyed, because these structures have generally found the means to act in service to our people and communities. It is an example which is not conclusive in all areas, but it illuminates the way. Our domestic resources are also another way to manage public life. We do not have the means to manage society as is the norm in Paris or Washington,DC. Our Yoruba brothers have said: It is the house that we look at before giving a name to the child, we check the size before wearing our clothes, and wear shoes that fit our feet, that is true wisdom. However, as we look at the billions that we spend in pure loss due to improper financial administration methods, we have to say that we unnecessarily multiply and keep structures and services that are not truly essential, while taking finance away from those structures and services that are indeed essential. There are so many undiscovered resources, available immediately, as has been pointed out in this conference. Let us look, for

example, at the transfer of liquidity of Algerian workers toward their country from France, the importance for Israel in the Jewish Communities in the diaspora, the solidarity of animated projects in their village by the Portuguese from abroad, these are a few examples that should enlighten us.

THE DIASPORA: A SOURCE OF WEALTH

One million Beninese in Nigeria, another million dispersed between Senegal, Ivory Coast, Gabon and France, this is a source of wealth that no government until now has really organized. Yet these men and women deeply attached to their country of origin do not ask more than to contribute to its rehabilitation provided that a regime is installed which can arouse their confidence. Another source of wealth is our relationships with our partners in the international community. **Note, we say partners, this is not about begging: it is about building together**, and that is possible. Nicaragua has achieved, through non-governmental organizations, a very genuine round table on the issue of solidarity for genuine development. If we are faithful to our commitments during this conference, it is a path that we can also follow on the basis of concrete projects aimed at the satisfaction of the immediate needs of our people. The non-governmental organizations have become a very powerful support towards development. They are both religious and secular, and they now have become various international institutions, outlining human rights, establishing lines of credit, setting up brief opportunities for direct support which can serve us immediately. In particular, I speak of everything that affects the educational services, health services, urban environment, and rural development ... Of course, let's not get ahead of ourselves, nor give anyone the impression that the solution to our problems will be easy. What your rapporteur has lacked in your deliberations, is that financial responses

really exist, as long as we address ourselves to the implementation of a national program of economic and social recovery.

I know that you are committed to better determine the outline of the Structural Adjustment Program in terms of understanding and implementing it, and you now know as well that this program is a challenge which calls for adult behavior, a rigorous administration, and competent men. I do not want to insist on other important axes of the work of our committee on economic affairs. The excellent report of Idelphonse Lemon demonstrated to us here today his unquestionable competence in this area and he will be available later today. The Structural Adjustment Program, coupled with the national program of economic and social recovery will put us on the path of national healing from the crisis that has held us in its grip. One of the most serious consequences of this crisis is the disaster that has suffocated our school system. Our schools are closed. Urgent measures are needed to redefine our schools with regard to life and employment. Our schools must be able to meet three objectives: general training, employment training, and character training. They must be able to put the young graduates into a relationship with an economic network that can support them as individuals and in the context of co-operative production.

GIVE PRIORITY ATTENTION IN EDUCATION

While the general assembly of education that you have requested takes place, it will allow you to apprehend a different vision of the training and the use of our human resources. We need to act urgently to enable emergency relief. Thus, all students and students in examination should receive priority attention nationwide on an advanced level. We also have to study our possibilities to arrange foreign grants - possibilities that we can negotiate in the next few days. Yes! I say in the next few days, because we do not have the option or the right to sacrifice a whole generation, by

waiting for the completion of negotiations with unions. The next government will have to act with special care in solving this major concern from the very first minute of its installation.

Our commission of education, having issued several proposals which you also will study and become familiar with, has placed a particular emphasis on science. This is good news. The people and nations that are truly developing are those which emphasize scientific research and its applications. The New Benin will have to lay special focus on this orientation to create a network of researchers tested in those areas that represent the basic needs of our Nation. Here, international cooperation should be used wisely, both in terms of resources and in cooperation with the most successful programs and structures.

FOR DEMOCRACY AND RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Ladies and gentlemen, "The day that has passed, is past, the hour that rings has rung, only tomorrow remains, and the days to come after tomorrow". We have lost enough time in this country; we have lost a lot of time. But we have just, since yesterday, won a century, the one to come. Yet the coming century itself may still escape us if we lack vigilance and audacity. You've said it yourselves, nothing is simply acquired; and therefore I remind you that I heard you call solemnly to all those who were listening that they themselves must defend their freedoms and their development using the peaceful means that we together have chosen. I heard you remind them to gather their energies to finally promote their development in solidarity as a resurrected People. I saw you listening closely to Patrice Gbegbelegbe and our friend Mitobaba appeal to all our friends around the world. We have chosen in all awareness a system of

government based on democracy, and on an endogenous and interior development. We have made this choice at a time when the whole world vibrates with accents of freedom. Recently, the French prime minister Michel Rocard, and it is you who remembered it, receiving the ambassadors of France gathered in Paris emphasized the essential things that we cannot escape. I quote Michel Rocard:

"There is no cure for situations of economic and social crisis which does not, first of all, proceed by a political will, particularly in a period of the spread of democracy and respect for human rights.

This is true in Europe, this is true in Latin America, but this is also true in Africa.

We need without weakness to remind our African friends that the freedom of thought, to express and to act in a way which implies a rigorous respect of fundamental principles of human rights is a key factor in development.

It would be a bad policy to skip the essential: without freedom, there can't be any sustainable development.

The salvation in Africa, as elsewhere in the world can only come from the courage and the desire of its political leaders for truth and justice. The core values of democracy, solidarity, and respect for human rights are their best assets as they face the challenges of the future years".

We want to emphasize these words of Michel Rocard because we've already faced the temptation to despair with our friends and the world somewhat as these Polish in the past screamed out the shout that remains famous: "God is too high and France too far!"

If I translate accurately the feelings and remarks of our assembly it desires that I ask you, dear Mr. Ambassador to France, to personally

convey to President François Mitterrand our desire for an ever more honest and close cooperation. We wish and want that President Mitterrand will be the first guarantor of the contract of solidarity that we negotiated and sealed here.

Dear Mr. Pavlov, former colleague of the International Labor Office in Geneva, and, who today, serves as the Ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Soviets in the Benin Republic, our Conference has more than once made reference to the Perestroika. We have faith and we urge you to convey to Mr. Gorbachev that it is the wish of our Assembly, to express our sincere admiration and our hope that his success will also be ours; and to which we wish that he contributes powerfully.

Mrs. Ambassador of the United States of America, welcome to our Country. On behalf of this people, on behalf of this Assembly, a former fellow of the Harvard Center for International Affairs is appealing to you. Between the People of America and the People of this land of Benin, there is a strong and deep sense of solidarity. We need you here as witness. We need you as a partner. We need you as a friend. Please convey to President George Bush our sincere hope that he will be with us in our struggle for freedom, democracy and development. Give us the tools that we are missing today. Give us the tools and we will finish the job; and we shall all be proud of our common achievement.

Mr. Ambassador of Egypt, President Mubarak is today the respected Chairman of the OAU (Organization of African Unity), we welcome his attention, we welcome his good offices if need be. We are confident that the OAU will help this country to live in peace through justice and democracy.

Distinguished representative of Nigeria, we are your direct neighbors; you cannot overlook our deep sense of complementarity with you. We are sure that in this Assembly, President Babaginda

appreciates that if a new era opens in Benin, it is for Nigeria as well, an opportunity for building a stronger cooperation in our region for the benefit of our peoples. Oh yes, together, and certainly we will overcome.

Dear Mr. Ambassador of Federal Germany "der Mann hat einen grossen Geist und ist so klein von Taten". We have made major decisions. Will we be able to continue to hold them? Will the winds always be favorable? That is why we appreciate at its great value the definitive symbol of liberation that today means the destruction of the Berlin wall. We know what a reunited Germany means to Europe and the World. This lesson of tenacity and hope that you have given us as well as to the whole universe will mark this time in history. Our Conference wanted me to tell you that we are counting on you to ensure that our awakening and our renaissance are supported by the strength of your determination and the lucidity of your political choices.

Dear Mr. Roduit, delegate of Switzerland, a land of hospitality and a crossroads of the world where, as we have learned, that people of various national roots can live in harmony and solidarity. Our Conference is aware that your country is involved in our Structural Adjustment Program. She asked me to thank you and request you to transmit to the authorities in Bern our hope for an even closer cooperation.

And, I address you, Mr. Ambassador from Algeria, a land of experience which has mastered recently its own turn toward democracy - your country, we know, will be a valuable support to succeed our own systemic change. Finally!

Dear Ambassador of Ghana, you are the Dean of the diplomatic corps in our country. We trust that you will with all your colleagues watch carefully whatever happens after this Conference. As you want us to succeed, please mobilize on our behalf the goodwill of all your

colleagues and friends. We cannot name them all, but through you, we certainly welcome their advice and their support.

Ladies and Gentlemen, forgive me if what may appear as a digression in a report of this nature, but you wanted and you stated, I quote Mitobaba, we need to have the world as a witness to succeed the covenant that we concluded here. We therefore call clearly to the right and duty of interference from around the world. We call on the support of all so that we may definitively walk out of the abyss in which we have been immersed.

We ask the vigilance of our people, the support of our international partners, but let us also call on, as you wanted, our own spiritual forces. I want to translate the concern that this assembly has expressed, I would like to translate also its hope and its faith which reminds us what we already know: "The Man who puts a brake to the fury of the waves also knows from the wicked stop the conspiracies". I fear God, dear Abner, and have no fear. Because we have this faith and this hope, I summarize your speech, in a prayer of humble confidence: "God of our fathers, God of the innocent, to you we entrust the People that you have awakened: it is to You that we walk, by walking toward our destiny. In this new exodus, stop any vengeful arm, keep away all impostors, hold back all criminals".

Sunday, after all the invective and exposed disagreements, after our accumulated suffering and bitterness, this Assembly, having recovered in singing the national anthem, saw, "the "negraille" seated unexpectedly standing up under the sun, standing in the ropes, standing and steering the ship, upright and free". Mr. President it is not a favorable wind who does not know where it is going. You have wished that I translate our agreements I am always trying without really succeeding, to convey all the intensity of the message. But I am sure that each of us, from Bertin Borna to Simon Ogouma, from Paulin Hountondji to Robert Dossou, from Joseph Kèkè to Adrien Houngbédji, from Moucharaf Gbadamassi to Théophile

Paoletti, from President Emile Derlin Zinsou to President Mathieu Kérékou, has decided to extend a hand to each other. **This Conference deeply wishes to have succeeded in reconciling the nation with itself.** All our other problems, if we are faithful to the decisions that we have made, are already resolved in strength. It would be tragic if our fate, the fate of this whole people, would be that of the eaglet, "Wanting to add great chapters to history, yet, being nothing more than a picture that is pasted on the window panes". Then, because we have sworn to never more humiliate the intelligence, because the bindings are broken and that we have finally won the right to speak on behalf of Africa, and on behalf of the fundamental freedoms of men and women of this Continent, because we now enter as a major partner in a major world, and because the night has dissipated itself and the new dawn shines: "**At work my friends!**" We have defeated the inevitable.

A HISTORICAL AND FAIR ACT!

(Intervention of Mgr de SOUZA)

I just want to say to you all, that what you see on my face, what you hear from the heart that beats in my chest and what you see, the trembling of my members, i would first like to say to you all and in the first place to you Mr. Leader of the State, that I am simply and profoundly touched.

I am embarking on an adventure which I was not expecting, I am nominated in an historical act of capital importance, an unprecedented historical act, and I pinch myself to see if I am dreaming, asleep, or if I am truly awake, standing on my two feet.

I am moved, I am surprised, and even a little confused; confused because I do not know, if it is me or if it is someone else, if I am in the room or

outside of the room, if I am in this world or in another. And all these sentiments, Mr. President have their beginnings in your person and that is why I would like to tell you of all our recognition, and I don't think I'm betraying anybody here, by saying to the head of State that I address to him the deepest feelings of gratitude because, I do not know if you also were in the process of dreaming, or if you were spirited to lead by the hand of God, because you have made all the decisions in union with the National Executive Council, with the Party, with the Standing Committee of the National Revolutionary Assembly, a decision I say, of extreme importance, and of extreme seriousness and I admire your boldness.

I admire your magnanimity, I admire your foresight, I admire the fact that, as Head of the State, you realized, in communion with your people who tremble in their flesh, in their heart in their members, in their empty stomachs, in their ill-clothed bodies, in their poorly cared bodies - that it was time for things to change.

LOVE OF THE PEOPLE, COMMUNION WITH THE PEOPLE

You have entered in communion with this people. And, the other day, I told you that you have sympathy for the people and you corrected me straight away that this is not sympathy: I have love for this people. And when the heart that loves agrees to listen to and to close the ears of ambition, or power, this heart always finds the right words, the righteous acts, and you have found the right words, you have weighed an act which is fair and which is historical and for which Benin will always be grateful to you, for a long, long, long time.

I am not superstitious, but I am a believer. And I am trying to discover the world, the environment in which the Lord has put me and in which my life flows.

On February 19th and the eve of February 19th, the last thing we expected happened, it rained, and minister Dossou in his speech of entry has interpreted it as a sign of blessing. Today it is a bright sun that shines on the closure of our work. The rain that refreshes, the rain that fertilizes the soil to germinate the seed, the seed of the new Benin and the sun which gives its light in order that what is sown sprouts, matures and allows the people, the people of Benin to be able to stand as a people respected in their rights; a respected people in their freedoms, a respected people in their dignity to live in harmony, peace, tolerance, union with all the other peoples of the earth, all coming from the same God whatever name is given to them, called to be a great family where neither race, nor languages, settling of accounts, nor revenge have a place. This great family gathered together only through the love and determination of each so that all may live together. So thank you Mr. President.

It has been said, and you, even you said, Mr. President, that our country has both surprised and amazed us, and will always surprise. And President Zinsou has just reminded us that our country, the Dahomean people, is surprised sometimes by itself. Why? Because have we ever seen that, in the same hall, the representatives of the entire National Executive Council, the members of the ANR(ASSEMBLEE NATIONALE REVOLUTIONNAIRE), the Armed Forces, the representatives of power, the representatives of the administrative service have gathered, sat ,and devoted themselves to work for a progressive and smooth change, from one regime to another one? I believe that this is the first time that this has happened in the history of Africa. It is very much worth noting, and we need to thank God for it.

**“We commit ourselves to implement all decisions of the
National Conference”**

(Closing speech of *President Kérékou*)

Firmly resolved to assume the unavoidable requirements of the new history of our young nation, and to promote a genuine democratic renewal likely to guarantee the successful blend of all potentials and all creative energies of our people, to resolve the crisis and ensure the recovery of the national economy by the victorious implementation of our Structural Adjustment Program, **we took all our responsibilities in all awareness by inviting all the vital forces of our country, without consideration of their political sensitivities to a national conference to establish through dialog, consultation, and concord a dynamic and constructive consensus that meets the legitimate expectation and the profound aspirations of the entire people of Benin.**

During nine days, day and night, the echoing sounds of your deep and wide debates broadcasted live on our antennas have enabled the national, African, and international opinion, to be in tune with the various concerns and solutions advocated by those of us in this room.

THE PATH OF A NEW LEGITIMACY

In this solemn meeting of the official closure of the work of the national conference we would like to thank and congratulate strongly all delegates who have spared neither their forces nor their health to ensure that ignorance would be avoided and that the expectations of the people of Benin would not be disappointed. Here we would like to once again tell you how delighted we are for the enthusiasm with which you have overwhelmingly responded to our call, and the eagerness with which you have worked without distress during nine days and often late into the night.

We also especially wish to compliment your presidium and more particularly the man of piety which has chaired your work, His Excellency Archbishop Isidore de Souza here present. We pay him heartfelt tribute for his courage, his patience, his sensitivity, and his firmness, and especially for his lucidity and vision, all rare qualities among common mortals, qualities with which he has successfully managed all contradictions concentrated within the conference, all of these words of thanks go out, also, to all the former presidents that we do not consider, as far as we are concerned, as delegates to the conference but, rather, as our distinguished guests.

The democratic renewal to which this conference has devoted itself opens the way for a new legitimacy in our country, Benin.

To command is to predict will say the other. And that is why at the opening of the proceedings of this conference, Monday, February 19th, 1990, we said that we were fully aware of the consequences and of all the implications that would flow from your work. We are not surprised and we are therefore calm because we expected it; and most importantly, in a context much more respectful than those we had at certain times in our recent history.

Thank God, the solution has been found thanks to the chairman of the presidium.

Today Wednesday, February 28th, 1990, before the witness of the entire Beninese people, we affirm solemnly our commitment to implement in a realistic manner all decisions emanating from the work of the national conference of the vital forces of the Nation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the higher interest of the nation and the entire people of Benin we say that the decisions made by

the conference will be applied in order and in voluntary discipline. This is not defeatism, not capitulation; it is a question of national responsibility.