

# MY SPEECH AT THE INAUGURAL EVENING OF THE 25TH EDITION OF THE PARIS CHOCOLATE FAIR

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to speak before an array of important personalities, on the occasion of the inaugural evening of the 25th edition of the Paris Chocolate Fair.

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers of this beautiful event, Mrs **Sylvie Douce** and Mr **François Jeantet**, for choosing me as the Godmother of this edition. I also take the opportunity to congratulate them on their commitment and determination to promote chocolate for 25 years.

Their tremendous work and creativity have made the chocolate fair an internationally renowned event that has brought together more than 10 million people across all continents.

Please give them a round of applause.

Now, I would like to greet and congratulate Mr. **Gérald PALACIOS**, who is now taking over the lead of the Chocolate Fair, I wish him every success in this wonderful adventure.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

It's truly an honour to be here and to represent my country, the world's leading cocoa producer.

With an annual production of 2 million tonnes, cocoa represents 15% of the Gross Domestic Product, and nearly 40% of Côte d'Ivoire's export earnings.

It is indeed, a very important and strategic product for the Ivorian economy.

This is why it's important for us to attend the Paris Chocolate fair , which has become an essential event.

In addition, the Chocolate Fair has a social dimension that touches me particularly. For many years now, the funds raised at the end of the event have been donated to a humanitarian organization in order to save the lives of vulnerable children.

***This year, the funds will be donated to the Children Of Africa Foundation, to help thousands of underprivileged children in Africa. I would like to express my gratitude to them for this mark of generosity, which I sincerely appreciate.***

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Allow me to briefly present to you the Children Of Africa Foundation, the lucky beneficiary of this 25th edition.

I created the Children Of Africa Foundation in 1998 to help poor children and mothers in Africa.

We operate in 12 African countries with a focus on health, education and social sectors.

**In the field of health :**

The Foundation has just completed and opened a hospital with modern equipment for mothers and children.

With a capacity of 130 beds, this non-profit hospital provides free care to 25% of indigent patients.

In addition, the Foundation regularly organizes ophthalmological caravans and free vaccinations for thousands of underprivileged children.

**In the field of education:**

Every year the Children Of Africa Foundation travels around the country to distribute school kits to thousands of children from poor families.

With regard to actions carried out by the Foundation, the list would be long, but allow me to mention few of them :

- The construction of 3 shelters for victimized children;
- The construction of a school group and a high school,
- and the construction of an orphanage for abandoned children.

We also provide financial support and carry out specific activities to help other children's shelters across the continent.

I can assure you that today's funds will be used to support the Foundation's actions in the 12 African countries where we operate.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

At this point in my remarks, I would like to speak about an issue that is often raised, child labour in the cocoa supply chain.

Indeed, this problem is a sad fact that many countries around the world are facing, and Côte d'Ivoire is unfortunately no exception.

My dear husband, the President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire and the Government of Côte d'Ivoire have taken the problem very seriously and are resolutely committed to eliminating this scourge.

***Also, the National Committee to Combat Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labour, which I chair,  
Has been working with all partners to ensure the protection and promotion of children's rights and to eliminate this scourge from our country.***

In this context, we have carried out extensive awareness-raising campaigns in cocoa-producing communities and built many schools near the plantations.

We have been working with chocolate and cocoa producers to tackle this issue, I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their contribution. My thanks also go to the Coffee and Cocoa Board of Côte d'Ivoire which is an active partner to fight child labour.

In addition, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire has passed a law since 2015 to make school compulsory, which was not the case before.

All these actions have considerably improved the enrolment rate in rural areas, which rose from 59 per cent in 2008 to more than 90 per cent in 2019.

As child labour is mainly due to the poverty of producers, the Ivorian government is doing everything possible to improve their incomes and living conditions.

Also, the new forestry code adopted by Côte d'Ivoire will ensure the preservation of the environment in order to ensure that cocoa is grown responsibly and that protected forests are not occupied illegally.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Coming back to our inaugural evening, I believe it is going to be magical, with the performance of the famous band Caléma, as well as the sublime fashion show announced by Sylvie.

To this end, I would like to salute all the talented designers who will be presenting their magnificent creations, and the Ivorian designer Gilles TOURE in particular, who has for the first time designed a chocolate dress to be presented by Miss Côte d'Ivoire 2017.

This evening will of course allow us to discover the know-how of the best chocolate and pastry makers from all over the world.

Finally, I would like to thank all the personalities; the ambassadors from producing Countries; celebrities, the press for being here.

On that note, I declare open the 25th edition of the Paris Chocolate Fair.

Enjoy your night.

Thank you.