

## **MY SPEECH AT THE SIGNING OF THE CHILD PROTECTION PARTNERSHIP WITH THE U.S. GOVERNMENT**

Mrs. Dominique Ouattara, First Lady of Côte d'Ivoire, and Chairman of the National Oversight Committee of Actions to Combat Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labor (CNS) presided over the signing ceremony of a partnership for child protection with the U.S. Government, on Wednesday, December 7, 2022, at the office of the First Lady. Here is the First Lady's speech for the ceremony.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to see you at the signing ceremony of this important partnership between Côte d'Ivoire and the United States, for the protection of children in our country.

First of all, I would like to welcome the presence of the Minister of Employment and Social Protection, Mr. Adama Kamara, President of the Interministerial Committee for the Fight against Trafficking, Exploitation and Child Labor (CIM), and Mrs. Myss Belmonde Dogo, Minister of Solidarity and the Fight against Poverty and Executive Secretary of the National Committee for the Fight against Trafficking in Persons.

My greetings go to Mrs. Kandia Camara's Deputy Director of Cabinet, Ambassador Nogoziè Bakayoko.

My warm greetings also go to Mrs. Joan Lockard, Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy, as well as to the delegation accompanying her and which we have the pleasure to receive.

I also send my greetings to the European Union Ambassador, Mrs. Francesca Di Mauro who is with us this morning.

My greetings to Mr. Yves Koné, Director General of the Cocoa Coffee Council, as well as the Directors and Country Representatives of the public and private partner institutions: ILO, UNICEF, the World Cocoa Foundation, the ICI Foundation, Save the Children International and IRC.

I also greet all those present and thank you all for your important contribution to the national effort to address trafficking, exploitation and child labor.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The event that brings us together today is of great importance as it will contribute to the protection of our children's rights. Indeed, the signing of this partnership agreement between the United States and Côte d'Ivoire for the protection of children, is part of the country's efforts in terms of child protection.

And I am pleased that Côte d'Ivoire has been selected to benefit from the partnership program for the Child Protection Pact after the mission conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in June 2022 by the U.S. Department of State.

Indeed, our country has met the selection criteria to receive a grant from the U.S. Government of up to 10 million dollars, to combat child trafficking. And I would like to congratulate myself, while thanking the American Government for this important aid that will contribute to strengthening the capacities of existing governmental bodies in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as civil society organizations and international organizations, in order to effectively fight against child trafficking.

This new step in our common commitment to child protection is all the more encouraging, as the program as it has been designed, perfectly matches the vision of Côte d'Ivoire in terms of planning actions to fight against trafficking, exploitation and child labor in our country.

Indeed, the National Oversight Committee for fight against trafficking, exploitation and child labor and the Interministerial Committee for fight against child labor, plan their interventions through national action plans, in order to solve this problem in a sustainable way. These action plans are organized around three main areas

- Prevention through public awareness campaigns, training and capacity building of the various actors, as well as the creation of basic social infrastructures.
- The protection of child victims, with the construction of reception centers for the reintegration and resocialization of children taken from the hands of traffickers, as well as the establishment and improvement of child protection systems in Côte d'Ivoire.
- The repression of child traffickers, which includes :
  - The adoption of specific laws to fight against child trafficking,
  - Strengthening the capacities of defense and security forces,
  - And the organization of police operations in risk areas to dismantle child traffickers' networks.

Finally, we also emphasize sub-regional cooperation through the signing of agreements to fight against cross-border child trafficking.

All of these actions have already enabled us to achieve significant results, but many challenges remain. That is why I welcome the signing of this agreement and the strengthening of our partnership with the United States, which will enable us to step up our efforts to achieve our objectives in the fight against child trafficking in Côte d'Ivoire.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this point, I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to the American Government which has always supported us in this fight, and to all our partners who have been working with us for many years to eliminate trafficking, exploitation and child labor in our country.

I am convinced that despite the complexity of the task, our combined efforts will yield tangible results for the protection of our children.

Thank You