

**MY SPEECH AT THE 10TH EDITION OF THE CHILDREN OF AFRICA
FOUNDATION GALA DINNER**

Mr. President,

Dear friends,

I am particularly pleased to be here with you tonight for the 10th Children of Africa Foundation Gala Dinner.

Ten events already... I vividly remember our very first Gala, held in Paris in 1998, with all of the Foundation's friends and long-time supporters. At that time, my desire to help the children of Africa was deeply rooted within me.

Over time, that conviction has grown stronger, and together, thanks to your unwavering support, we have been able to make children's dreams come true.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I continue, I would like to first acknowledge the person who has never stopped believing in my convictions. That person is my dear husband, my better half, President Alassane Ouattara.

This year, the Foundation's new project dedicated to youth is inspired by his vision—he who has never stopped believing in Côte d'Ivoire's most precious asset: its youth.

After twenty-eight years of dedication—first to children, then to their mothers, and gradually to young people in need—I realize just how much his quiet and unwavering trust has meant to me over all these years. Beyond his role as Head of State, Alassane is also, and above all, the man who has always encouraged me to follow my convictions to the end, even when our projects seemed difficult to achieve.

My darling, this tenth Gala is yours as well, and I'd like to dedicate it to you. Thank you for always being my most loyal ally and my greatest source of support. I'd like to pay tribute to you tonight and thank you for your love!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests,

Tonight, we are pleased to welcome some very special guests who have traveled from all over the world especially for this occasion.

I would like to extend a special thank you to our guests of honor, my dear sisters Mrs. Ana Afonso Dias Lourenço, First Lady of the Republic of Angola, and, joining her, Mrs. Nathalie Villette-Wadagni, First Lady of the Republic of Benin, who have graciously joined us this evening.

My dear sisters,

Your presence among us touches me deeply. It is a testament to the solidarity that unites our countries and our peoples, reflecting the Africa we wish to see as united and fraternal. The well-being of our people and the special care we show them bring us together around causes that benefit the continent, and I am delighted that you accepted my invitation. Thank you, dear sisters, for making the trip to be with us. Let's give them a big round of applause.

I would now like to acknowledge and thank the Foundation's loyal supporters, whose presence and kindness have never failed us. They are my dear friends:

- Professor Marc Gentilini, the most loyal of the loyal,
- Ms. Mélissa Bouygues and Mr. Olivier Bouygues,
- President Pierre Fakhoury and his wife Mireille,
- The President of the Chaîne de l'Espoir, Professor Eric Cheysson, and his wife, Professor Véronique Abadie,
- President Serge Varsano,
- Ms. Danielle Ben Yahmed,
- Ambassador Frances Cook,
- Attorney Jacqueline Laffont-Haïk,
- Minister Yamina Benguigui,
- And Minister Michel Sidibé,

Thank you, dear friends, for your loyalty, affection, and unwavering support.

I also extend my greetings to all the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire, and in particular:

- My dear brother, Mr. Tiémoko Koné, Vice President of the Republic, along with his charming wife Maïmouna,
- Prime Minister Beugré Mambé,
- Ladies and Gentlemen, Presidents of Institutions,
- Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Government,
- And Ladies and Gentlemen, Ambassadors accredited to Côte d'Ivoire,
- As well as their spouses.

I would also like to extend my warmest thanks to all the distinguished guests and notable figures who have come from near and far to participate in this exceptional evening, and I would like to mention:

- Mr. Serge Ekué, President of BOAD,
- The presidents and CEOs of companies who are with us tonight and who support the work of the Children of Africa Foundation. I would like to mention in particular:

- President Diaby Bacary,
- President Hassan Dakhalallah,

President Diego Aponté and Mr. Philippe Labonne,

- Presidents Ibrahim Jabeili, Abdel Mamadou Sy, Giresse Tella, and Tommy Tayoro, as well as Mr. Chacus Landry,
- President Cessé Komé,
- Presidents Mamadou Bamba and Ahmed Cissé, among others. ..

Thank you also to all of you, dear donors, for your generous contributions, which enable us to continue working on behalf of the most disadvantaged.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would now like to welcome and thank the distinguished stars who have come from all corners of the world to, once again, bring our Gala dinner to life.

Tonight, my friend, the talented pianist H  l  ne Mercier-Arnault, wife of Chairman Bernard Arnault, is here with us to support the Foundation. And I am very happy to have her here.

I would now like to welcome our international music stars:

- The exceptional Gims, my younger brother—thank you for being here to support us—
- Our legend Alpha Blondy,
- The talented Fally Ipupa,
- The legendary band Magic System,
- Our dear Dadju,
- The incomparable MC Solaar,
- The famous Marc Lavoine,
- Chico and the Gipsies,
- The magnificent Zaho,
- The rising stars Tiakola and Joe Dwet Fil  ,
- The talented Sidiki Diabat  ,
- Our divas Charlotte Dipanda and Bintou Dj  likaba,
- As well as Singuila, Black M, and Fanny J,
- And finally, the talented all-female group As Gingas, who have come here especially from Angola.

My warmest greetings also go out to our renowned film actors and actresses who have traveled from afar for this exceptional charity event:

- Our international star Isaac De Bankol  ,
- The famous actor and director Gilles Lellouche,
- The magnificent actress Audrey Tautou,
 - The charismatic Tomer Sisley,

- The lovely Elsa Zylberstein,
- The Ivorian actor and director Jean-Pascal Zadi,
- And the great producer and loyal supporter of the Foundation, Dominique Besnehard,

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the personalities from the worlds of fashion, media, and entertainment industry who are with us tonight:

- The lovely Sylvie Tellier,
- The magnificent Adriana Karembeu and Noémie Lenoir,
- Our dear Miss Universe Iris Mittenaere and our stunning Miss France winners Flora Coquerel and Maeva Coucke,
- The exceptional choreographer Kamel Ouali,

I would also like to greet my dear goddaughters, Miss Côte d'Ivoire, our lovely Olivia Yacé, and our stunning Fatima Koné and Cadic N'Guessan.

I would also like to thank our athletes and figures from the world of sports:

- President Samuel Eto'o,
- Soccer legend Basile Boli,
- Our Olympic champion Cheick Cissé,
- Our sprinter Murielle Demps-Ahouré,
- President Stéphane Richard, and the players of Olympique de Marseille.

My thanks also go to the talented visual artists:

Ouattara Watts and Aboudia from Côte d'Ivoire,

And the sculptor Dominique Zinkpé, who is here from Benin.

I would now like to turn my attention to our great Ivorian artists, whose influence extends far beyond our borders:

- Himra,
- Didi B,

- Serge Beynaud,
- Kerozen,
- Suspect 95,
- Our diva Roseline Layo,
- And Mula.

Our distinguished actresses:

- Eva Gueï,
- Karidja Touré,
- Kady Touré,
- and Marie Paule Adjé Achirou.

Our talented fashion designers:

- Joséphine Mémel,
- Gilles Touré,
- Zack Koné,
- and Ibrahim Fernandez.

A big thank you also to our two auctioneers, Julien Vincent Brunie and Jean-Noël Sampah, who are conducting the auction with expertise and skill.

I would also like to thank our friends from the local and international media who came especially for the event.

Thank you all for being here to support the cause of Africa's children and youth.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear donors,

This year, the Foundation's traditional Gala is themed "Lights of Africa: Together for a Youth That Shines." Indeed, the event that brings us together this evening aims to shine a spotlight on our youth.

As you know, since 1998, the Foundation has been working tirelessly to improve the daily lives of the most vulnerable children and, by extension, those of their mothers. Our efforts have transformed the lives of thousands of families in Côte d'Ivoire and eleven other African countries. In this way, we have taken concrete action in the areas of education, health, and social services.

Thanks to you, our dear donors, and your continued generosity, we have been able to achieve major milestones, such as:

- The Bingerville Mother-and-Child Hospital,
- The three shelters for children in distress in Soubré, Bouaké, and Ferkessédougou,
- The Abobo School of Excellence,
- The new Children's Home,
- The Bingerville Living Center for children undergoing long-term hospital treatment and their families,
- And finally, more recently, the "Safe Home" Women's Shelter in Adiaké.

Just this morning, we had the immense joy of inaugurating the new pediatric cardiac surgery center at the Bingerville Mother-and-Child Hospital, for which we raised funds in 2024 during our previous Gala.

This specialized unit, built on the hospital grounds, is designed to complement the existing care pathway and provide surgical treatment for young patients with heart conditions. We will thus be able to save the lives of more sick children, particularly by performing open-heart surgeries on-site, without the need to transfer patients abroad.

Dear Friends,

The children of yesterday have become the young people of today. Many of them—who were taken in, cared for, and educated thanks to you—are now young adults seeking opportunities for the future. It is for them—for this generation that holds the future of our nation and the African continent—that we wish to build a space dedicated to them: the Youth house. In this way, we hope to focus more attention on our young people's needs for support, guidance, and a listening ear.

Located on a 1.6-hectare plot of land bordering the lagoon—donated by the Ministry of Youth in the heart of Abidjan—this facility will feature 3,604 m² of built-up area and nearly 7,500 m² of landscaped outdoor spaces. It will offer our young people a modern setting in which to learn, create, start businesses, play sports, and engage with culture. This will enable them to broaden their horizons and prepare for their future.

To finance and carry out this wonderful project, we will need to raise 5 billion CFA francs, or 7.5 million euros. It is an ambitious goal, but I know, dear friends, that I can count, once again, on your unwavering generosity.

At this point in my remarks, I would like to thank Mr. Mamadou Touré, Minister of Youth Promotion, whose department is supporting us in the implementation of this project and, later, in its management.

I would also like to thank our two architects who worked pro bono on the model of the Youth Center, Mr. Fadi Mouawad and Mr. Alphonse Kai, and who brought our wonderful project to life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During this evening's event, an auction will give you the opportunity to acquire magnificent works of art and collectibles selected with the utmost care. I hope you will enjoy them.

In addition, the performance that will be presented to you shortly, choreographed by the talented Georges Momboye, will—I am certain—inspire you to dream.

I must not forget to thank our star hosts, Konnie Touré and Yves Zogbo.

I'd also like to thank the world's most-starred chef, Yannick Alléno, who has prepared tonight's gourmet dinner for us. And along with him, I extend my warmest thanks to our excellent Ivorian chef, Ms. Christine Dadié, who will introduce you to the flavors of her homeland. Thank you both for delighting our palates with your unparalleled expertise.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to extend a special thank you to the organizing committee of this Gala, masterfully led by Ms. Nadine Sangaré, Director of the Children of Africa Foundation, and her entire team.

Bravo, Nadine, for the extraordinary work you have done over the past few months in preparing the event .

I would also like to thank my dear friend Elisabeth Gandon, General Coordinator of the Foundation, without whom none of these galas could have taken place.

Thank you, dear Elisabeth, for your discreet and effective support.

I also extend my gratitude to all the members and volunteers of the Foundation—those we never see on stage, but without whom none of this would be possible.

Thank you also to all our partner companies, who have worked tirelessly to make this evening unforgettable:

- Delight
- NCI
- Voodoo
- Roni Fleurs
- ZH Consulting
- Shem's
- And the Sofitel Abidjan Hôtel Ivoire.

Thanks to everyone's efforts, we've been able to turn months of preparation into an exceptional event. I would like to congratulate you and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Dear friends, dear donors,

Together with you here tonight, I express the hope that all these "Lights of Africa"—our young people—will continue to shine brightly for the development of Côte d'Ivoire and Africa.

Thank you.