

Speech of His Excellency

Abdou Diouf

President of Senegal

Winner of King Faisal International Prize

For Service to Islam 1998/1418H.

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Bissmillah Rahmani Rahim

Your Royal Highness Prince Sultan Ibn Abdul Aziz
Second Deputy Premier, Minister of Defense and Aviation
And Inspector General
Your Royal Highnesses,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

The King Faisal Foundation has kindly bestowed upon me its International Prize for Service to Islam.

I am most appreciative of being honoured with such a distinction. This honour goes not just to myself but to the people of Senegal whose ancestors were among the first in West Africa to embrace Islam. This people, in its great majority, has never stopped proving its commitment to the sublime teachings of our religion.

Indeed, some famous scientists of Senegal, men of God, have made a place for themselves in popular Islamic thought through their extensive writings and through their exemplary words and deeds, thus contributing to the influence of Islam in Africa.

Clearly, Senegalese leaders have endeavored, since independence, to foster and enrich this heritage, both nationally and internationally. Thanks to the will of Allah the Almighty, I have been fortunate to add my stone to this building in the service to Islam, in my capacity as President of the Republic of Senegal and in previous positions of responsibility.

It is this option which accounts for the existence in Senegal, in the past as well as the present, of dynamic Islamic organizations and a vigorous Arabic Civilization.

All the same, it is not by pure chance that the Research Centre on Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), which is subsidized by the General Secretariat of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has chosen Dakar to host, from 26 to 29 December 1996, its symposium on Islamic Civilization in West Africa.

Likewise, the commitment of Senegal for a closer cooperation between Africa and the Arab world has made my country the one to host the First African and Arab Foreign Ministers' Conference. Today, my country is committed, with the same faith and determination, to attaining the objectives of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference over which I was pleased to preside when the Sixth Islamic Summit, the first of its kind in Sub-Saharan Africa, was held in Dakar.

If, during my term at the head of the OIC, my country has laid bare its great attachment to our common organisation, it is because it views the latter as pursuing, among other commendable objectives of the Islamic Ummah, the attainment of a noble mission: that of popularizing, on the world scene, the true message of Islam.

This message, which I can never repeat often enough, is that of a religion not only of total devotion to Allah the Almighty but also of tolerance, of love of neighbour, of absolute respect for all men and women, and of banning all excesses. The Permanent Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs, which has been put under my chairmanship since the historic Summit of Makkah Al Mukarramah, is doing its best to spread this message. This undertaking is today a sacred duty for all Muslims. Senegal has been contributing positively to it, through the OIC and through its close relations with countries sharing the same concerns.

Taking into account all these considerations, I must say that the Prize the King Faisal Foundation has been kind to bestow on me is, for the Senegalese

to whom I dedicate it and for myself, an encouragement to remain resolutely in the service of Islam. We are fully aware of its significance and scope.

I therefore accept it, on behalf of all my compatriots, with great joy, as you may guess. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the King Faisal Foundation, to its distinguished Director-General, His Royal Highness Prince Khaled AL-Faisal, and his aides.

My gratitude is all the more heart-felt because this prestigious institution, with an international reputation that reflects its important missions, has remained faithful to the fruitful thoughts and deeds of the late King Faisal bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud, who still is a potent source of inspiration for us all. In paying a sincere tribute to the memory of this illustrious sovereign, I would like to pass my greetings to his distinguished sons who are perpetuating his work, with the untiring support of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahd bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud, and of the Crown Prince Abd Allah bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud, and of the Second Vice Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Prince Sultan bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud.

Today, this work is not only pursued but expanded thanks to the grace of God who has blessed the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the presence, at its head, of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, my brother and friend King Fahd bin Abd Al-Aziz Al-Saud.

I am convinced history will record his exemplary achievements, inside his country and beyond its borders, towards the preservation and promotion of Islam in such a short time. To King Fahd and to the Crown Prince who is assisting him in this exciting task, I would like to renew my personal admiration and that of the Senegalese people, as well as our determination to maintain with Saudi Arabia, special relations of fraternal friendship and solidarity.

Thank you for your kind attention

Assalamou Alaikoum Wa Rahmatoullahi Wa Barakatouhou.