

LCRD Day Three (December 4, 1999)
President Kérékou's Closing Address

Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are going to ask you to stand. So that we can, in spite of our great emotion and our great sadness, remember the thousands of men and women who left their continent of Africa under conditions that each one of us is aware of, and who were not even able to arrive at their destination. They died in horrible cells and were thrown out to the high seas or on the beach, in the oceans. If we could please observe a moment of silence in remembrance of those who died. For those of us who have faith, we can classify them as some of those who will appear in the Great Tribulation, knowing that there will be others, according to the word of God. There will be a Great Tribulation that will only concern those who had no faith and who did not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. There are also other dead who will enter this great category of tribulation but who don't belong to such a cruel and bloody period of history. But they are the victims of colonization, of the ramifications of the slave trade. After the slave trade there was a difficult time period that we call "colonization." There is another time period that we should remember, and there is one that continues still today. This period in which we live is the period of fraternal wars between people of the same country. It is part of the ramifications of the slave trade and of colonization.

And in this room, we have titled representatives who also want to speak after the closing of our sessions to tell us what is occurring in their homelands. I believe that the honorable representative of His Excellency the President of the Popular Democratic Republic of Algeria delivered his message. You see the situation that prevails in his country. There is also among us a notable guest, the former Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo, whose capital is Brazzaville. His Excellency Mr. [sounds like Korena] is among us. Mr. [Korena], we saw him at Libreville; at that time he was the Prime Minister of President [sounds like Yousouba]. Perhaps he remembers that day, it was during one of our first encounters, when I told him, "Mr. Korena, until now, you have played the role of a referee in your country. Why have you desired the position of Prime Minister? Have you put aside your referee's shirt?" He did not answer me. And I said to him, "If there is to be an end to war, it will depend on you, and if war has to be fought in your country, it will depend on you." You will find out today whether or not he believed me. If he did not believe me, you will all know it today. But we should invite him to come up to the podium and to speak to us because the war raging in his country depends on him and he also has to conduct himself as a man from the south of Africa who lives abroad. I want to do this in order for you to get to know him. Is it not said that one can know men who are important because they are in charge of civil wars in their homelands and not abroad. You must greet him. He now lives in exile in the United States of America. That is why we wanted our African American brothers and sisters to know that that which you experienced during the time of slavery continues on the African continent because we continue to fight each other. We shouldn't have any illusions.

Therefore, let us observe a moment of silence in honor of all those men and women, whatever the place in which they now find themselves.

[Moment of silence]

Honorable Personal Representative of the President of the Popular Democratic Algerian Republic,
Honorable Leaders of the Institutions of the Republic of Benin,
Honorable Members of Government,
Honorable Deputies of the National Assembly,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the Diplomatic Corps and of International Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen, Participants at the Leaders' Conference on Reconciliation and Development,
Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Here we are at the conclusion of our work.

For three days, we have exchanged our experiences and our evaluations of the past as well as our visions for the future. We have lived together as mortal men and women, in a world that is not that of our Creator who is omnipotent, on an earth already condemned, according to His Word. In any case, what a privilege it has been to commune intensely and deeply to attempt to live according to His Word, that is nothing else but His Truth and His Truth is eternal life. Only God knows if we have succeeded and if we have progressed in our great human endeavor.

Only He knows if our inflexible common will to forgive each other, patterned after His divine teaching, will permit us to implement agreement, peace, solidarity and cooperation between African Americans and Africans of Africa.

Nonetheless, strong as our faith is that we have done so, we owe Him thanks to have enabled us to gather together in His name, because it is He that allowed our gathering, which from now on can be considered a historical gathering.

Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In inviting you to this conference, we wanted in our own way to express the desire for peace and agreement that inhabits all the people of Benin, and that each in his wisdom each time the demon of division and of violence sought to distract him and send him into darkness [note: the meaning of this sentence is ambiguous even in French]. The history of our country is rich in gatherings at which confrontations miraculously transformed themselves into gatherings of tolerance, of agreement, and of dialogue. The National Conference of Live Forces of the Nation [note: literal translation], held at Cotonou from the 19th to the 28th of February 1990 is one of such great gathering that ended in extraordinary results concerning which natural intelligence will never cease to wonder.

Since then, we Beninois men and women have always sought to rid our behavior and our individual and collective comportment of that which can lead us to division. This step has

permitted us today to share with our African American brothers and sisters the great work of forgiveness and of reconciliation for the crime against humanity carried out in the slave trade.

We sincerely thank you for your attention to our proposals when, while visiting the United States of America, we expressed our fervent wish to bring our modest contribution to this great human endeavor under the protection of God.

In listening to the conclusions of your work, we realize the depth of your analyses and we greatly appreciate your reflections on that which remains for us to do.

The important thing is that we have dared to look at ourselves in order to find out from whence we come, who we are and where are we going.

Each recognized his part of responsibility. We must now determine, without complacency, concrete actions to take in order to create new conditions and new relations between the African communities in Africa and with the African American communities—and also among other members of the Diaspora. In other words, among all communities, whether or not they can be implicated in the African Slave Trade, but who resolutely wish to join the construction of a world of reconciliation, brotherhood, friendship, solidarity and cooperating action.

Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please remember that during the solemn opening ceremony of this conference, each speaker invited us to find within ourselves and with the help of God the necessary resources to respond to the duty of memory as well as to open our hearts to forgiveness and reconciliation.

The task will not be easy, for we must attack deep-buried feelings that go back centuries. So you were right in your recommendations when you expressed hope that the symbol of reconciliation would materialize; and the model of this reconciliation is here in our midst. Our intention is to enlarge this statue and to make it approximately the height of the person of whom Pastor David Perrin has already spoken.

The Republic of Benin and its government would like to thank you for choosing this land of suffering, which has become a land of hope, as the place to erect a memorial in honor of reconciliation and of peace.

You can rest assured of our availability to uphold any initiative that will offer those who left Africa in violence to find her again as a hospitable land, full of love and brotherhood. They, the African Americans, will then be able to bring their contribution to the struggle that the African population is facing against poverty and misery.

To reconcile in order to be able to work together in the battle for political, economic, social, cultural, and especially spiritual development is the fundamental goal for the upcoming century and the principal cause to take up at all costs—and it is in our sights, if it's in God's will, of course.

Mr. Vice-President,
Honorable Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of the people of Benin and its government, we would like to once more express our sincere gratitude to you for responding with such spontaneity and generosity to our invitation.

We hope that you will take back with you unforgettable memories of your brief stay. Please express to our sisters and brothers of the Diaspora, and—why not—even to our former masters, our profound gratitude and our ardent desire to welcome them very soon, as they return to their homeland.

May God bless our noble intentions and give us the strength to address the numerous causes that constitute our historic heritage—the slave trade, colonization, the new kind of colonization, and civil wars—that agreement, concord, tolerance, understanding, dialogue, and reconciliation be ours, be our reason for being on this earth, condemned though this earth may be, as we have already stated. The prince of this world, Satan, is already judged. And the flesh is crucified. Which means the final victory belongs to the Creator and will happen, like it or not. And His Son, Jesus Christ the Lord, He who gave His life as a ransom for our sins and before whom every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the glory of God.

It is with this hope that I declare closed this Leader's Conference on Development and Reconciliation.

Thank you.