**Fourth legislature**

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**Address by His Excellency MOUSTAPHA CISSE LO, Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament,**

**on the occasion of the International Conference on National Reconciliation Experiences**

**House of Councilors, Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco,**

**17 - 18** **January, 2019**

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Your Excellency Mr. Abdelhakim Benchamach, Speaker of the House of Councilors, President of the Association of Senates, Shoura and Equivalent Councils in Africa and the Arab World (ASSECAA);

Your Excellency Mr. Habib El Malki, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Kingdom of Morocco;

Your Excellency Mrs. Amina Bouayach, President of the National Council for Human Rights;

Your Excellency Mr. Meshal bin Fahm Al Salmi, Speaker of the Arab Parliament;

Your Excellency Mr. Elias Castillo, President of the Latin American and Caribbean Parliaments;

Your Excellency Mr. Ahmed Chaouki Benyoub, Interministerial Delegate for Human Rights;

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Honorable members of the Moroccan Parliament;

Honorable members of regional parliaments;

Distinguished guests in your respective ranks and titles;

Ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me, at the beginning of my remarks, to give thanks to Allah the Almighty, for leading us in the New Year 2019, with the hope that it will reserve us pleasant surprises. I wish each and every one of you good health, prosperity and peace in carrying out our projects.

It is always with renewed pleasure that the ECOWAS Parliament participates in the activities of the Moroccan Parliament, which I salute the dynamic and exemplary cohesion for seeking an inclusive democracy.

May I, therefore, once again thank our friends in the Moroccan Parliament, the Speaker of the House of Councilors of the Kingdom of Morocco, H.E Mr. Abdelhakim Benchamach for this kind invitation to take part in this high-level Conference, and for all the attention extended to my delegation and myself since our arrival here in Rabat, a land of hospitality, tolerance and democratic openness.

Distinguished President, I request you to kindly extend our deepest gratitude to His Majesty King Mohamed VI, "May God protect him" and all our consideration for his enlightening leadership and all efforts made for the sake of peace, cooperation, development and regional integration.

The theme of the Conference that brings us together today, on the experiences of national reconciliation that led to the establishment of peace, political stability and the achievement of social peace, is a very timely and relevant one.

To begin the activities of the year with exchanges on the theme of peace is, in my opinion, of paramount importance in our common journey towards an Africa reconciled with its daughters and sons in the light of our past which has been characterized not only by glorious events, but also by serious violations of the rights of Man and of the Citizen.

This Conference is therefore in line with international and community debates and will allow us once again to highlight the vision of parliamentarians in proposing solutions to these challenges.

**Mr. President;**

**Distinguished guests;**

With regard to the ECOWAS Parliament, one of its major objectives is to contribute to the promotion of peace, security and stability in the West African region. Under Article 7 of the Additional Act to strengthen Parliament's prerogatives, our Institution can now mediate in political conflicts to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms.

ECOWAS in its initiatives and interventions to bring back peace has always favored dialogue and negotiation despite having a military force called the “ECOWAS Standby Force”. In recent years, many countries in our region have experienced major political crises that have led to the intervention of ECOWAS:

- In January 2017, in the Republic of Gambia, at the announcement of the results of the presidential election, the former Gambian President Yahya Jammeh decided to contest the victory of his successor Adama Barrow, which he had previously recognized. ECOWAS has tried everything to bring the former leader to his senses. Between armed intervention and mediation, the West African organization favored the path of dialogue that led to the departure of former President Yahya Jammeh.

- In Mali, faced with the scale of the multidimensional crisis that resulted in the armed conflict in that country, ECOWAS mobilized political, economic, social and cultural actors that lead to the signing of an agreement, known as the Algiers Agreement and a road map for the achievement of peace in Mali. This legal and diplomatic arsenal allowed the successful organization of the presidential election in July -August 2018. The case of Mali will be exposed to you by the Honorable Moussa Badiaga of the delegation of Mali and member of the ECOWAS Parliament.

- In 2018, the ECOWAS Parliament conducted a number of mediations that brought the protagonists to sit around the table and begin a dialogue for the return of peace. Thus, in Sierra Leone, after the presidential and legislative elections, the opposition leader Julius Maada Bio was elected President of the Republic against the ruling party candidate Samura Kamara, thus consecrating the political change in the country; but, the opposition Party that won the presidential election did not win an absolute majority in parliament. The first session devoted to the swearing in of new MPs had to be postponed after violent brawls broke out between members of the ruling party and those of the opposition.

- As a wise observer, I sent a parliamentary mission of good offices which, with the support of the ECOWAS commission, managed to bring the elected officials back to calm, to allow the installation of the new Parliament. A final evaluation mission will be sent from 22 to 29 January 2019.

These are just a few examples of mediation that ECOWAS undertakes on a daily basis, operating, as needed, its early warning mechanism. These initiatives are in line with the UN Guidelines, the African Union Strategy and the ECOWAS crisis management mechanisms, including the Additional Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

**Mr. President,**

**Distinguished guests,**

Experiences from other countries around the world tell us that reconciliation processes are inherently complex and often go through a number of stages that can turn out to be opportunities, just as they can be a dilemma for an entire people. I want to cite, for example, East Timor and Cambodia in Asia, Chile in South America; Kosovo in Eastern Europe, and in Africa - Rwanda, Burundi and South Africa.

Despite the complex nature of these processes, the peoples of those countries that have experienced dictatorships, civil wars, genocides and injustices caused by the state have managed to make decisive steps towards reconciliation.

They have thus given us the proof that this complexity of the process of reconciliation, far from being an obstacle, rather testifies to the imperious duty for all the actors to engage in it with serenity, sincerity and determination.

In such an exhilarating task, it is essential to make a good start, and above all to make sure that the march towards reconciliation is irreversible. In this process, the focus must be on good governance and respect for the rights of citizens as fundamental values ​​for peace and development in Africa. I hope that Rabat is a new beginning for peace in Africa. The Kingdom of Morocco is a successful example of the culture of peace in Africa; and I hope that “the peace pipe that is shared here, be smoked by all our states”.

**Mr. President,**

**Distinguished guests,**

I reiterate the willingness and commitment of the ECOWAS Parliament to contribute to the favorable conditions for peace, security, democracy and development of the region.

I can already recommend the synergy of efforts and the promotion of partnerships at communities level and civil society groups, in order to contribute to the success of sustainable exit from crises in the sub-region, to support the reconciliation and reintegration of people whose lives have been disrupted by violent conflict.

The culture of peace in West Africa is and remains an imperative for economic development and a requirement for social cohesion. That is why I cannot conclude my speech without congratulating and thanking the organizers of this Conference, especially the House of Councilors of the Kingdom of Morocco for this happy initiative.

With these words, I wish the Conference every success and thank you for your kind attention.