

## **LAURANT GBAGBO'S SPEECH**

Dear friends!

Dear comrades!

I would like first of all acknowledge the diplomats present and thank them for honoring our congress with their presence.

I would like to acknowledge the Political Parties coming from outside, those that were able to come and those that could not come and send messages it is friendly, it is fraternal and I want to thank them.

I must evidently acknowledge the Ivorian Political Parties who out of friendship have come and are present and have stayed till the end of work.

I would like in particular acknowledge the presence of the traditional rulers of Blogos, you must know that the 'Hotel Ivoire' is built on the Blogos land. Those days we were students at Lycée Classic here, there were challenges the people of Blogos went through before the Hotel was built. We are very grateful to the chiefs and the people of Blogos for providing accommodation for our comrades who have nowhere to go.

I am thanking the the traditional rulers of Blogos but among them, is my friend from Bonougou, Dagbolo Saï I, I just had a friend, just like that, a life time friend. I am acknowledging his faithfulness, his loyalty, a true friend, because he is very loyal he was present during all the struggles and he fought for us. We salute you Dagbolo Saï I.

In the room there are a lot of comrades I cannot acknowledge all but I will acknowledge few: Loko Mensah former agriculture minister of Houphoet Boigny, senior brother Akpete Quashie former minister of Houphoet Boigny, Madam Danielle Bonie, the professeur Pierre Sané, our friend from France Jean-Pierre Lecoq, the prime minister Akingbo.

I would like to acknowledge our friends, from Tchad, from Ghana, from Niger, from Mali, from Burkina Faso, from RDC and the delegation from Congo Brazzaville. I thank you all since you are here.

I cannot start this discourse without saying a word to Sangaré. I am sorry but it is part of my life, the fact that Sangaré is not here today is a burden for me but it is not an handicap because we have to learn to live without those who are no more with us but it is a huge loss for me, and I think a lot about him.

After these acknowledgments my dear friends I want to specially greet the foot soldiers without whom I am nobody. They have resisted, they have fought in the villages, in towns, on the streets they have been intimidated, teargassed but they went on demonstrations they are always there! Those people I cannot forget them. I am greeting you from the bottom of my heart because they were at the center of all the struggles, the fights the demonstrations.

Foot soldiers I greet you! Foot soldiers I greet you! Because I, I was arrested and put into prison! If nobody bears my name, if no one carries on the fight I have been forgotten! But so far as in the villages, in towns, on the streets, in the offices there are people who bear my name and are struggling for my freedom, those who arrested me will never be at ease; and that is what you have done! That is why I am grateful to you!

When the time comes we will send delegations to thank the authorities of the countries that accepted the refugees. My mother was a refugee in Ghana; it is when she felt that she is on the point of dying she decided to go and die in her village. Those countries that offered us hospitality in difficult times we must go and show them appreciation: au Ghana, au Togo, au Benin, au Liberia etc.

We should not forget but continue to tell the Ivorian government to allow our brothers who are still in an exile to come back home; either we have gone over a difficult moment or we have not. If we have, and the problem is solved why should we still accept that there are brothers, friends, and comrades in an exile in disastrous conditions? No! Let us allow them to come home! I discussed it with the president Ouattara and I will say it again, it is time to create the conditions so that all the sons and daughters of this country who wish to return, come home they should be able to come without being intimidated. It is one aspect of our immediate struggle and we will continue it.

Those in prison, yes! Concerning the prisoners I told president Ouattara during the audience he accorded us and I will say it again! The people went to prison because of me! I, I am outside, they, what are they doing inside prison? They have nothing to do with prison from the moment I was not found guilty and I was discharged! I demanded and I will demand again our compatriots who are still in prison either civilian or military they must

come and join us outside. This should not be a fight it is a simple logic therefore help me, let us mobilize so that we ask for freedom for our prisoners!

I would like to salute the people of the diaspora, the African people of the diaspora and the Ivorian of the diaspora. We were at Achébénougé, we were not many and one day somebody told that in fact ivorians are stubborn! I asked why? He said every week end they are in front of the prison! They have never be tired being there!

It is true the African diaspora has worked a lot! They fought for our freedom! Every weekend they are in front of the prison and sometimes if we have to live the prison to the court they have to pass different and many routes because the roads were occupied by the Africans coming from everywhere especially from Paris! I salute you, I salute that diaspora who has refused to forget and has not forgotten, and did not make us to forget! Because the worse that can happen to a prisoner is to be forgotten. If you are forgotten you are dead! But when there are articles everywhere and always in Europe, on the American continent, as long as Gbagbo is in prison for obscure reasons, you are not forgotten! Because people would like to know why are they saying “for obscure reasons”! And the people will be asking, and the office of the prosecutor was helping us with their judiciary carelessness, that fuel the curiosity of the people and the people were questioning! One time they brought a witness, a lady who claimed she was raped, the president of the tribunal asked her: where you raped by this man? Then she said no, as for this man I don't know him! Those are the things that were happening and in law they look for the one who committed the crime! How come somebody like me Gbagbo they can put in my charges: rape!

It is not necessary to arrest people when there are no serious accusations against them. Often I tell my visitors that I am not a prisoner but an hostage, I am an hostage and I am here so that others can govern, if not all that they are saying do not concern me, when I came the judges came to the same conclusions two times; in 2013 when they should examine the charges to see if the charges can be used to prosecute me, two against one said NO! There is not enough evidence to go to court. They said it does not matter you must go. And this can be checked in the CPI achieves! And it is true! And towards the end of 2018, the last quarter there was the same results two judges out of three have decided that I am innocent and free of all charges!

Dear brothers and sisters this is me before you! Before you to start again our path, to start together our path! Why am I saying this, I am saying this because there are a lot of speculations, unacceptable statements which have been being said: Gbagbo will no more do politics, Gbagbo will go and sit in his village! I want to know when I wanted to start politics did I ask their opinion?

Even my father and my mother I did not ask them their opinion. But they, because it is they who brought me up with certain values, it is natural for them that I do politics. My father took his first political card membership in 1947, I was two years old when my father took his first political card! My father was imprisoned at Asabu in 1964, he was a political prisoner! My sister is among you, at that time we did not know where to go? I the elder, I was nineteen years old, but we have survived and we were told to work and have our certificate and live our lives! One day I left school to go and look for a job because none of us, I and my sisters and brothers have nothing to live on.

Luckily I did not get a job, friends I went to, to help me get a job, they died when I was in prison, maître Rene Kanga et August Denis George former MP of San Pedro they all advised me to go back to school, soon you will have your 'A' level and get scholarship! Why do you want to waste your life! These two friends I always think about them because they help me to keep focus! They belong to the PDCI (Houphoet Boigny Party) I am not a member of PDCI I was nobody because I was nobody there was nothing opposing PDCI, but they show friendship! They explain to me Gbagbo we are in the boarding house you are eating and we are going for lectures, exercise patience and you will get it. I follow their advice and I passed the A level and the rest is history!

They are saying I will no more do politics, why do they want me to stop doing politics! Now that I am seventy six years old they want to give me a calendar for my political life, I Gbagbo! I don't understand them! "What you did not do, you want to undo it!" why? The man before you, you don't know him and you want to find and political calendar for him! Me, I will do politics till my death! It is I and I alone who will determine how to do politics in which form, there are people older than me who are into politics. Stop that debate, in fact I don't want to hear it again because it is not their problem.

I and my friends are in together in an entity called political party. We decide what is good for us not others who will decide for me to go and sit in my village! Do they know my village, it is sad but I, I am not in politics to make some happy and others sad! I am putting on the political market my

ideas and together with friends we discuss them and do what we want with them!

Since I came, since I am jobless I watch television and that, since Bruxelles that is when I got to know those young artistes that help me a lot to have fun and new ideas.

People are saying Gbagbo always come with new ideas during Houphoet Boigny time he came with democracy, now he is talking about pan Africanism? Where is it coming from? I am telling you where it is coming from. It is Kwame Nkrumah who wrote Africa Must Unite but I may say Kwame Nkrumah was former students in USA; he who wrote Africa Must Unite. Look at the USA; they are 200 years of independence they fought hard for it. They started with 13 states; we can compare it with ECOWAS today! They thought it is not enough, and after the secession war they added all the other states that were forming, today they are about fifty one states.

So far as Africa remains with smaller states, is that not given you some imaginations! look at the world today the powerful states are huge in size: China, Russia, the USA, Canada they are countries which are huge in size, but in Africa each person can be a president in his village, with this tiny countries we are not independent, it doesn't make us powerful.

I visited China and they played the Ivorian national anthem; but what were my thoughts when they were playing the anthem? I thought they were fooling me, because apparently we were two heads of states, two national anthems, two delegations we were discussing but I am nobody in front of the china president.

When you go to France and visit the Elysée and they mount the guard, the French president comes to meet you, you feel big, but the one receiving you did not see you important, in reality you are not important, politically you are not important?

My brothers so far as we are in a micro states we are nobody that is the source of pan Africanism it worthless to be chasing theories! Consider the facts, with all humility I don't want to cite countries so that I embarrass people I was head of state before too; let us be realistic! The countries they talk about a bit in Africa who has a little bit of economic power are Nigeria, South Africa Egypt at least they are a little bigger but what about us? We have cocoa, we are the first producer of cocoa and San Pedro is the biggest cocoa harbor and so?

Do you know the cause of the problem between Houphoet Boigny and the world Bank, towards the end of his reign?

He attempted to block the cocoa so that the price will go up. When the World Bank saw that they diversified the production of cocoa, they gave money to Malaysia to develop the production of cocoa. They have the means.

Look at Europe who colonized most Africa, today each country of Europe is small, since the end of the Second World War they unclench the process of coming together, they created one currency, we don't just create one currency like that! They are advancing, that process will lead to the creation of one nation in future which can challenge the USA, Russia, China those are the blocks that are being shaped: the USA, Russia, China, Europe while we are still small countries. No, no, no and no. we must open our eyes. Today we have Africa and the Latin America who are fragmented. Therefore African states must unite. That is why PPACI must appeal to other progressive parties to come together.

I heard somebody saying when Gbagbo was a president he did not do anything, I thank him but I started and they launched war against me. There are some people who talk as if the war was not a real reality but the war was there!

I was the first Ivorian president who got elected an Ivorian at the head of the OAU because I believe in the pan African Organisation and I wanted Kone Yaye and the general secretary here at Mawa; who is a skilled diplomat. He was the last general secretary of OAU and the first president of the African commission. I did that.

I work such that the cocoa commission which was at London came to Abidjan Dane Gégé was the agriculture minister at that time, then the war started and all my worries was to end the war, for ten years war! For ten years I virtually have no government, it is from outside they were dictating to me if you want the war to end, you have to take such and such as prime minister. They are competent and nice people but they were not our prime ministers. The only prime minister I named during my first term was Affy Ngussan during the second term the prime minister I named was Aki Mbo! Aki Mbo could not take office when the war came to sweep us.

Therefore the pan Africanism is not a slogan! It is a reality! When you have a certain height, small and you have only cocoa to put on the table, you cannot raise your shoulders and walk before the people, when you are passing people are laughing, when they are playing your national anthem people smile! That is why when I was head of state I don't ask to travel and visit European nations! Because when you ask to visit them they think you are coming to ask something! I was going where they invited me. I went to France three times because three times they invited me. I went to Italy

because I was invited; I went to china because I was invited! When you are at the head of a small country obviously poor, when you ask for official visit the people think you are going to ask something, no, no you must learn to manage! That is why we have done a secure budget, it means we spent what we earn that is secure budget we must be simple in our language. We were spending hundred billions a month for salaries of workers and we secure them and for other expenditures we manage to get them. It was a personal proud for me to face other expenditures without borrowing. I started building Yamoussokro, the presidential palace is to be delivered in 2012 I was arrested in 2011, the palace is still there in completed, the president is there but I am not here for that, but I can say that we did not borrow any money. It is our capital town may be that is what they are accusing me off, to beat my chest and say it is our capital! Our parliament, our presidential palace I will not borrow for that! Where we borrow money is how to get to Yamoussokro, there was a motorway which stop at Singbogborogbo I borrow from the Arabs and we have built the motorway up to Yamoussokro. My dear friends we have created the PPACI, there is no need to come back and explain why we are creating a party because there are some polemic that are useless.

We are ready but there is no need to over explain when the issues are sterile and will not bring anything to the national debate.

You have elected me as the president of the party I thank you, I thank you but what I want to say I said it already, it is no one business to fix the end of my political career, it belong to me and my comrade.

Now what I want to tell you is that we have face challenges in the past because I left the head of the party in 2001 as the constitution stated it but there was no preparation handing over and that led us to the catastrophe that we all know. People they planted things in their head, that the ears can be bigger than the head, ears cannot be bigger than the head else you are a monster. We must prepare the withdrawal of the elders! It is something that is prepared! The structure of the party that I want and I suggest to you, is a structure to prepare my retirement! It is a structure that tomorrow I can go peacefully to my village without regret! It is a structure that allow the party itself to control the one leading it! I worked months and months for that, from my liberation from La hay, since I was in Bruxelles, since I was in la Cote d'Ivoire I was working on that, how to leave without hurting our working tool for we must have a working tool, we must have our struggle tool but how not to break it as we did the first time that is why I did some few arrangements. My dear friends my ambition today is to leave, not to leave and abandon you, I will always be a militant of our party, a foot

soldier, now I don't need to be going on demonstration that I can lead a party or I cannot lead a party; I led a party and led a country. If the circumstances decide I am ready. De Gaulle did not decide to be a head of state, it is the circumstances that brought him to power. If the circumstances bring somebody to power yes, but at this age the wise thing to do is to prepare to leave. I decided not to go all of a sudden because once it happened and it did not succeed. I will go but know that I am with you, all the struggles that we have to fight we will fight them together. I will not allow anybody to decide for me, let us make sure the party has the capacity to lead, that is the capacity I am fighting for! May God bless the Ivory Coast!