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Dear Mr Serote,

Initiated by Haiti within the framework of the World Decade for Cultural Development, co-sponsored by Benin and approved by the Conference of Heads of State of the OAU and the General Conference of UNESCO as an international project, "The slave Route" has aroused and still arouse great interest among the international scientific community. Its nature and aims have led to several international consultations of scientists and scholars in the field of culture, particularly during the two meetings of experts held at Port-au-Prince, Haiti, from 11 to 13 August 1991, and at Cotonou, Benin, from 21 to 23 July 1992.

Besides UNESCO and the OAU, eminent personalities, among whom His Holiness Pope John Paul II and Mr Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize winner in Literature, have backed the project.

Being aware of the fact that the slave trade has deeply and durably marked the relationships between Africa, Europe, America and the other continents, and that it constitutes a major event in the collective memory of mankind which, when taken in all its dimensions, is likely to reinforce solidarity between peoples of all races, and taking into account the interest aroused by the project as well as the different activities and preliminary efforts undertaken by Haiti and Benin, the 27'11 session of the General Conference of UNESCO adopted this project and invited all the Member States to intellectually and

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financially support it and to participate in the Launching Conference organized by the Republic of Benin and which will take place in Cotonou from the 1st to the 5th of September 1994 on the theme "From the slave trade to the challenge of development".

Within the framework of this symposium, the papers that will be presented on the various aspects of the slave trade will enrich the debates in the plenary session and in the workshops. Each paper should be accompanied with concrete proposals (focal points of reflection, guidelines for research, collection of oral traditions, identification and/or restoration of sites and monuments, teaching documents, symposia and seminars, promotion of tourism, etc.). The papers will enable the Conference to draw up the orientations and suggest the activities on the basis of which the International Scientific Committee will prepare recommendations to be submitted to the Director-General of UNESCO, to the Member states and scientific institutions. It is within this context that we invite you, on behalf of UNESCO and the Republic of Benin, to participate in the Launching Conference and to present a communication in workshops on the following theme: "Slavery and racial discrimination".

In order to let the other participants attending the Conference have the papers in advance and therefore to create the conditions for a high-level scientific dialogue, we would be grateful if you could let us know of your decision to participate in this Conference and send us your paper, if possible at the beginning of June, or by 25 June 1994 at the latest.

The travel, accommodation and meals for the participants will be paid for by the host country. The Government of Benin has entrusted the intellectual, technical, material and logistic organization of the Conference to the Benin National Committee for "The Slave Route", headed by the Minister of Culture and Communications and supervised by Professor Elisee Soumoni, the national Coordinator of the project. I am sending you herewith, for your information, a preliminary document regarding the intellectual organization of the Conference.

Yours sincerely,

Signed on behalf of UNESCO: Signed on behalf of Benin:

Doudou Diene

Director, Division for Deputy Permanent Delegate  
Intercultural Projects of Benin to UNESCO