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Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the last session. It is a WPC tradition. We bring together three people who have attended the entire conference, who have not yet spoken and who will talk about something they have chosen themselves, that is either a reaction to something they heard in the debates or a point they think was insufficiently addressed.

We will begin with General Béhanzin. You may have heard him speak last year at a session on security issues in Africa. He is tall and, as Victor Hugo said, that is why when I walk up to him I would rather sit down right away so it might not be so noticeable. General, the floor is yours.

Francis A. Béhanzin

Thank you, Mr. President.

Dear friends and participants, I am delighted to see you here in Abu Dhabi and to have attended the panel discussions chaired by Jean-Claude Trichet, Bertrand Badré, Marc-Antoine Eyl-Mazzega, Gérard Mestrallet, John Andrews, Terry Martin, Daniel Andler, Lucia Sinapi-Thomas, Nikolaus Lang, Valérie Ducrot, Adil Alzarooni, Michel Kazatchkine, Jean-Michel Severino, Steven Erlanger, Renaud Girard, Seán Cleary and Virginie Robert. I have not forgotten our conversations with Kevin McCarthy, Kevin Rudd, Aiman Ezzat and Anwar Gargash.

This is the third time I have come to this major event where geopolitical, economic and security issues are discussed under the watchful eye of the United Arab Emirates, a land of great religious tolerance, as demonstrated by the Abrahamic Family House, which includes a Catholic church, a synagogue and a mosque, as the chief rabbi of France reminded us again today.

The participation of leading figures and Heads of State and government over the past 17 editions attests to the fact that the World Policy Conference is a major international event. Allow me to give a nod to His Excellency, Mr. Tiémoko Meyliet Koné, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, whose speech at the opening of our conference I salute.

This conference is often placed under the moral authority of great religious leaders such as the Chief Rabbi of France, Haïm Korsia, and the Archbishop of Constantinople, Patriarch

Bartholomew, who told us on December 9, 2022: “The war in Ukraine caused by Russia’s unjust aggression in February 2022 is the worst European geopolitical and humanitarian crisis since the end of the Second World War. [...] We will establish that the source of our misfortunes are errors of judgment concerning matters of faith. [...] The understanding of the new world taking shape before our eyes must take religion into account.”

In 2022, right here in Abu Dhabi, we spoke at length and in depth about the situation in West Africa and the Sahel. Has it gotten any better? No, quite the contrary. The coup in Niger added to the toll. Three Sahel countries have left the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The situation speaks for itself in Guinea, where a coup has resulted in disappearances, imprisonment, deaths and more. Recently, almost 150 people died during a soccer match.

In 2023, war broke out between Israel and Hamas and Israel and Hezbollah, and then came the debacle in Syria.

Nevertheless, there have been some happy events: the uproar against the foreign military presence in Africa, the CAN 2023 in Côte d’Ivoire and the Paris Olympics.

These great sports events bring people together more than wars, which mercilessly destroy them. We have not talked enough about the world’s youth, especially in Africa.

As the vice-president of Côte d’Ivoire stressed in his keynote address, short, medium and long-term perspectives are needed to address the world’s ongoing deterioration. Having opted for a continuous diagnosis in the very short term, the World Policy Conference will have to shift toward more realistic approaches to solutions. That said, why not turn it into a global lobby to plead with world leaders for a reasonably open, more humane world?

I must admit that when I was invited to the 2022 WPC, I thought it would be yet another hypocritical talkfest, like the forums of what is confusingly called the international community. However, together with my sponsor, Professor Robert Dossou, to whom I pay tribute, I realized from the outset that Professor Thierry de Montbrial and his entire team were highly intelligent and in control of the whole operation.

I do not regret taking part for the third time, as the planning and management were perfect in every visible area.

The participants are first-rate. The themes, both in the plenary and workshop sessions, are relevant. The discussions are of the highest quality and very useful. The atmosphere is very friendly and the time may have gone by too fast.

Realistically, in the short term, strategic thinking in concentric circles must continue to achieve reasonable, humanly satisfactory results. In my view, nothing in the world seems irreversible, even if events are frightening. So why not have a world spiritual conference, since all peoples believe in something? The Chief Rabbi of France said so today. The WPC has made the bold

choice, both in human and financial terms, to analyze things without the emotion, passion, warped language, harmful hypocrisy and double standards that, unfortunately, are all too common today.

Humanity has a choice between realistic solidarity and collective suicide.

That is why we must abide by Albert Einstein's thought: "The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them without doing anything." The WPC cannot and must not continue to let this happen.

I would like to conclude on the topic I know best: security solidarity worldwide. In Africa, especially West Africa, we can consider two levels. The first is regional solidarity. ECOWAS encompasses 15 states, and everybody knows that each one looks after the safety of its own citizens and their property. Mali, which I know very well, Burkina Faso and Niger have left ECOWAS out of unhappiness with its lack of regional solidarity. ECOWAS sets the rules for overall regional strategy, but each country must look after its own security. At the regional level, we have drawn up an estimated \$2.3 billion action plan.

We have received no support. And yet when Russia invaded Ukraine, the US alone gave the country over \$100 billion to keep the fighting and killing going.

The second level of solidarity is international. In Mali, as in Burkina Faso and Niger, we have benefited from international solidarity, but the results have been unsatisfactory.

That is the main reason why Africans have stood up against the presence of foreign forces in their countries. If today terrorism has not collectively spread, because terrorism in the Sahel is a collective unit, and there is only isolated terrorism in Europe and the West in general, it is because the air force keeps an eye on these countries, in addition to all the measures taken on land to protect citizens. But African states do not have these resources.

That is why, in keeping with the aims of the WPC, I would like to make the case for international solidarity. Mr. President, my dear friend, I give you back the floor. Thank you very much.