



**Speech addressed by His Excellency
the President of the Republic
at the XVI Award Ceremony of the North-South Prize
of the Council of Europe**



House of Parliament

29 March 2011

Mr. Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament,
Mr. Speaker of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,
Secretary General of the Council of Europe,
Ms. President of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre,
Distinguished Laureates,
Members of Parliament,
Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always with renewed pleasure that I associate myself with the award ceremony of the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe.

A satisfaction that owes a lot seeing recognition being shown to personalities whose paths in life are an example and an inspiration to all who fight for a fairer World, where respect for Human Rights, Democracy and solidarity amongst peoples are not just an ideal but a daily reality.

This year's ceremony is being held within an international context deeply etched by the events in the southern reaches of the Mediterranean, which so vividly alert us to the risks that can arise from political systems based on intolerance, on authoritarianism and on the absence of the fundamental guarantees for the exercise of civil and political rights.

The developments we have been witnessing stress the urgent need for new models of cooperation between the North and the South.

We know, from our own experience, that the building of a plural democracy, where peace, freedom and prosperity may flourish, is a course that demands perseverance, work, dedication and, very frequently, sacrifice. Our neighbours in the Southern Mediterranean will thus require great determination in the introduction and pursuit of political and economical reform that will allow a peaceful change towards Democracy and development. But it is also fundamental that, in this task, they may count upon the solidarity and support of the international community and, very specially, that of their Northern neighbours, the European countries.

It is in this context that the North-South Centre, through its working experience with the countries in the region, is called upon to perform an even more active role in the promotion of convergence for dialogue and cooperation between the two Mediterranean shores, involving civil societies, non governmental organizations and all the partners prepared to support the ongoing changes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These introductory show the topicality of the values and the mission that guide, since their inception, the Council of Europe and the North-South Centre, and that this year's laureates so eloquently demonstrate.

The distinction of Louise Arbour is due to her contribution towards the defence and expansion of the area of application of Human Rights and for the strengthening of the devices for the investigation and condemnation of all the breaches of such Rights.

Louise Arbour has a very rich and diversified life path and a curriculum filled with examples of her involvement in assignments and incumbencies in the areas of justice and Human Rights. Particularly visible, in the sights of the international community, was the dedication she evidenced and the quality with which she exercised the important duties of Prosecutor of the International Penal Courts for former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda, and as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, between 2004 and 2008. In this latter office she was empowered with the difficult task to succeed an extremely prestigious Brazilian national, endowed with a notable political and ethical capacity, Sérgio Vieira de Melo, to whose memory I once again render my deepest tribute.

Throughout her brilliant juridical career and in the different international offices she occupied, Louise Arbour always raised her voice on behalf of the inalienable rights of the poorest and least protected, of the victims of conflict and of the oppressed in their fundamental rights.

The other laureate of this year is one of the most remarkable figures of our times, and a great friend of Portugal.

Lula da Silva is paid tribute for the dynamics he introduced in the “South-South” relations and for having led a foreign policy invested in promoting, on a global level, the fight against poverty and the promotion of economic development and social justice.

His life’s path has been, since early years, that of courage, tenacity and generosity in the face of adversity, obstructions and the difficulties of the weaker. In the course of the eight years during which he exercised his office as President of the Republic of Brazil, Lula da Silva demonstrated that it is possible to effectively promote economic growth without forgetting the neediest, committing himself determinedly with policies that are in these days a model for many other countries, guided towards the eradication of hunger, poverty, sickness and illiteracy, and the support for economic and social development.

These concerns were equally reflected in the area of Brazil’s foreign policy. Through his words and acts, Lula da Silva was always a fighter against the injustice, misery and privation that still affect a substantial part of humanity, leaving us an inspiring heritage, which his current action – and, I have no doubts, also future – will continue to enrich.

Great leaders distinguish themselves by their capability to translate ideas into material undertakings that muster hope. This is, indisputably, the case with Lula da Silva.

Although with distinct paths and in diversified contexts, the two laureates in this edition of the North-South Prize of the Council of Europe are joined together in their fight on behalf of justice, freedom and respect for human personal dignity. By challenging resignation in the face of injustice, they inspired millions of people, strengthening our trust in the best that exists in the men and women of our time, and our hope for a better World.

It is to this contribution from Louise Arbour and Lula da Silva that the jury of the North-South Prize decided to pay tribute. For me, it is an honour to be able to join this fairest of recognitions.

Thank you very much.