

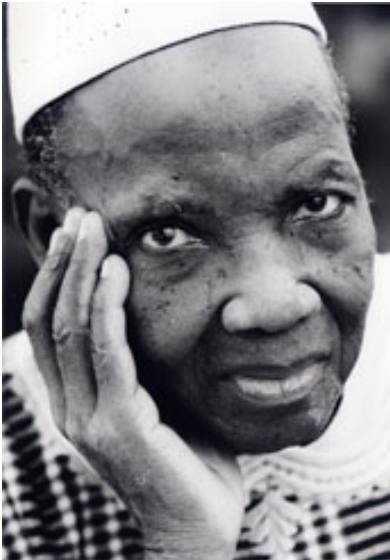


The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Burkina Faso)†

(1997)



...for a lifetime of scholarship and activism that has identified the key principles and processes by which Africans can create a better future.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo

Joseph Ki-Zerbo was born in 1922. He was educated in Burkina Faso and at the Sorbonne in Paris, graduating with an honours degree in History from the Institut d'Études Politiques in Paris in 1955. He returned to Africa, first to Conakry (Guinea) and then to his native Burkina Faso (the Upper Volta), where he was politically active since 1958. Later he was a MP and leader of the opposition party Parti pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (PDP).

Parallel to his political life he was a scholar, historian and writer. In 1972 he published *L'Histoire de l'Afrique Noire*, the standard work on the subject, which he updated repeatedly. From 1972-78 he was a member of UNESCO's Executive Council and Professor at the Université d'Ouagadougou. He was a member of the Scientific Committee for UNESCO's 8-volume history of Africa and director of the first volume, *Méthodologie et préhistoire africaine*, which was published in 1981.

The theme of Ki-Zerbo's work as a historian was endogenous development. In 1980 he founded the Centre d'Études pour le Développement Africain (CEDA) in Ouagadougou about which he wrote:

"CEDA conducts research which is actually rooted in our land for the purpose of determining one or more global hypotheses of understanding, liable to inspire action by Africans and capable of integrating ecological preservation, the social praxis and cultural identity, key sectors which are almost invariably treated as secondary in development projects."

In 1983 Ki-Zerbo was forced into exile by the military regime. He went to Dakar in Senegal where he reconstituted his centre as the Centre de Recherche pour le Développement Endogène (CREDE). It was under these auspices that Ki-Zerbo organised the inter-African and interdisciplinary meeting at Bamako (Mali) in 1989, the results of which were published in 1992 as *La natte des autres: Pour un développement endogène en Afrique*, which won the European Community's Book prize at the Dakar Book Fair in 1993.

Ki-Zerbo returned to Burkina Faso in 1992 and decided to reconstitute CEDA there. All his previous

equipment and his library of 11,000 volumes had been destroyed or dispersed. Ki-Zerbo described the aims of the new CEDA as follows:

"We must return the institutional imagination of African societies to their tradition of creativity across the widest possible range of science and technology, and on this basis rearticulate a theory and praxis that are appropriate to their situations. We must rebuild the identity from which the African peoples have become alienated by the vicissitudes of history and their own amnesia."

CEDA was the base from which Ki-Zerbo conducted his intellectual crusade for a re-founding of African development goals and methods.

The three strands of Ki-Zerbo's life and work - historian, action researcher and advocate for endogenous development, and politician - were closely linked: his profound understanding of Africa's past was the bedrock for a political philosophy which sought to establish the framework for a different and genuinely African path of development.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo died in 2006.

Quotation

"The Africa which the world needs is a continent able to stand up, to walk on its own feet rather than on crutches or on its head, in vacuous mimicry or escapism. It is an Africa conscious of its own past and able to keep on reinvesting this past into its present and future."

Joseph Ki-Zerbo

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