Reply of the President of S.A.C.

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies,

In the name of the Society of African Culture I thank you for your kindness in according the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists the warm welcome of which your presence in this Hall of the Capitol is the most flattering evidence. I should particularly like to thank the distinguished personalities from Government, municipal and cultural circles who have been kind enough to support us by coming here, and who, by the eloquent speeches which you have just applauded, have stressed their sympathy with us in the achievement of our task. Our warmest thanks are due to Professor Gianfranco Alliata, President of the Italian Institute for Africa who has granted us the cordial hospitality of the magnificent services of the Institute and the invaluable co-operation of his whole staff with a generosity which leaves us as pampered beneficiaries who cannot repay our debt. In return for all this we can do no more than say « Thank you ».

Ladies and Gentlemen, it was not a mere chance that we chose Rome as the setting for our deliberations. Is it not true that Rome is one of the starting points of that prodigious Western culture whose radiance still endures after more than two thousand years? Is not Rome the creator of a conception of Law and Justice which is the foundation stone of many societies throughout the world? And finally is not Rome one of the most fruitful and illustrious centres of Art and Beauty? It was therefore natural that men whose origins are marked by the indelible seal of History and Destiny, who are seeking to discover themselves, and who find themselves in the midst of a vast movement of solidarity and mutual support, should have chosen Rome as a place to find concrete lessons on the unity of the human race and on the ideal of a greater cohesion between men of all countries and all races.

That is why we are here.

And, first of all, we wanted these deliberations to be purely cultural, because we wanted to exclude anything which might divide us from one another, such as militant politics, for example, and rather seek to find just those ideological elements which are calculated to unite the greatest number of intellectuals — artists and writers — and induce them to come to grips with their problems, to expound and debate them in ordered fashion and if possible to point out the road of mutual understanding. Furthermore, we specified that it was a question here of the problems which concern Negro writers and artists in relation to those which we have already studied, discussed and partly solved at our First Congress, held in Paris in September 1956.

You will remember that, at that period, we brought into relief the fact that there was a crisis in Negro-African cul-
ture, and our line of approach at that time consisted precisely in tracking down the various aspects of that crisis, its consistency and its depth, in order to conjure away the evils. In 1956 we appealed to all our comrades, just as we have reiterated the same appeal in 1959, we solicited the co-operation of all those who could claim to belong to the Negro race, or be regarded as belonging to the Negro race, adopting as our criterion the same characteristics as world public opinion gives to that term.

To-day, as yesterday, we intend to conduct our proceedings with the serenity of a scientific conference. To-day, at this Second Congress, we want to put the accent on the Unity of Negro-African Culture and the responsibility of Negro writers and artists in connexion with the dissemination of their work. The determination of this unity of our culture in the heterogeneous world in which the millions of Negroes of Africa, America, Europe and Asia live, is not an easy problem to solve however one looks at it and from whatever angle one tackles the facts. It implies at the outset the detachment of the artist from the social and cultural setting in which he is implanted, so that he can distinguish himself from his surroundings. Above all, it is necessary that he should be in a position to have a conscience worthy of his responsibility as a Negro writer or artist and that the sense of an appropriate ethnic solidarity should be developed in him. Or again, it is necessary that, in every discipline, without his being concerned about it or even observing it, the Negro writer or artist should instinctively represent in his conception of life and art one of the elements or perhaps the very essence of Negro thought throughout the world and down the ages.

Be that as it may, we addressed ourselves to all those whom we knew and who were indicated to us, all over the world, as writers and artists, and we asked them to contribute in their respective disciplines the fruit of their meditations, their labours, their efforts and their ambition. It is from all that that the substratum of our Second Congress is composed.

Our thanks are due to all those who have helped us to work out the material of our Assembly. Our thanks are due to all those, poets, musicians, novelists, scientists, philosophers, thinkers, theologians, of whom I see a great number among us, come from Africa, the Americas, the Antilles and the countries of Europe. Our thanks are also due to all those whose professional obligations or, more unfortunately, whose lack of means, have prevented them from joining us, but who have nevertheless responded to our appeal by sending us specimens of their work.

And now, with your permission, I declare the Second Congress of Negro Writers and Artists formally open.

Dr. Jean Price-Mars.