

UPF Biel / Bienne, Switzerland has Africa Day with Swiss-African Organizations

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Biel/Bienne, Switzerland -- Africa Day was celebrated by UPF with a discussion of the power of the African diaspora to benefit Africa.

For the ninth consecutive year UPF-Switzerland celebrated Africa Day with associations from the Biel/Bienne region, particularly CAM (Collective of Pro-Migrant Associations) and SABRIF (Swiss-African Bridge).

About 50 people gathered on May 25, 2019, in the Multimondo intercultural center, the most appropriate place for multicultural exchanges, which also provided childcare in the LibriMondo intercultural library.

This year's theme was "How Can the African Diaspora Contribute to Good Governance in Africa?" In order to ensure that no migrant was excluded, the organizing committee decided to celebrate Africa Day at the same time as World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development and to provide bilingual French-English translation.

Johnson Belangenyi, the president of the Swiss-Exile Foundation, acted as the moderator. He began by introducing Nadia Magnin, an intern with Multimondo, and Armando Okito, CAM's president. They provided the framework for the event by showing their contribution for these two international days. Marie Mubyeyi, president of SABRIF, stated that Africans should devote more of their private time to working together for better governance in the various countries in crisis.

Chantal Chételat Komagata, the secretary general of UPF-Switzerland, presented the link between these two international days and the Five Universal Principles recognized by Ambassadors for Peace; by the way, most of the participants recognized themselves as Ambassadors for Peace.

Mrs. Komagata referred to the two recipients of the 2019 SunHak Peace Prize, both of whom are African: Waris Dirie, a human rights activist who has raised awareness about female genital mutilation; and Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, president of the African Development Bank, for his vision of African agricultural sectors being transformed in order for Africa to overcome chronic poverty and stand by itself.

The UPF secretary general expressed her faith that each person present could have a significant impact in the world, as long as they establish peace and good governance in themselves.

Each participant then chose one of three workshops that focused on the central topic and brought together a wide range of expert perspectives.

The Economy and Reality of the CFA Franc: The CFA ("Financial Community of Africa") franc, a

legacy of French colonization, has had a huge impact on the French-speaking West African countries that use it, among other political and economic entities; it is not controlled by African countries but by the importing countries, basically to their advantage. If the consequences were only negative, those countries would be much less developed than the rest of Africa, which is not the case. However, all African countries are linked together and must achieve true independence and prosperity, not expecting external help. They should be developing their good governance from within instead of starting from scratch by making a revolution. A proposal for economic change was also presented and discussed. The final slogan summed up the workshop well: "Evolution brings more fruits than revolution!"

Women's Awakening in the Transformation Process: Moderated by Félicienne Viloz, this group highlighted many stumbling blocks, such as the need to improve women's education, empowerment and training to end discrimination and enable them to contribute to good governance in their country. Women must recover their intrinsic value and establish strategies to reach the target populations without relying on external assistance. Any transformation requires time, targeted information through a community approach, and women's cooperation. Participants concluded that women must take charge of their own lives without waiting for men's help and must support each other in this process.



Mediation as a Solution for Cohesion: This workshop, moderated by Johnson Belangenyi together with Male Dioum from Mali, highlighted that mediation requires finding peace in oneself to resolve various conflicts. Dialogue being the basis of all cohesion, it is sometimes through a neutral third party that a common ground appears, when the conscience of both parties is not developed enough to follow the path of wisdom. The time factor, a common objective and the questioning of each actor are essential to reach a consensus and a "win-win" situation. In particular, we may all ask ourselves how often we follow our conscience and intervene in a conflict of which we are aware and to what extent we are trained to do so. The workshop concluded with the need for ongoing training to prepare to act as a mediator in any situation.

Even after an hour, participants wanted to continue their group deliberations. They finally gathered in the main room to hear summaries from the representatives of each group; again, the presentations were numerous, which is a proof that everyone was fully captivated by the theme.

Many promised to stay in touch after the event so that Africa Day 2020 would be held at an even higher level. The discussions continued until 9 p.m., while the participants enjoyed delicious African dishes prepared by Marie Mubyeyi.

The participating Muslims who were observing Ramadan could eat in another location from 9 p.m., thanks to an Iftar organized by migrant women's associations.