

Linking Heavenly Africa and Heavenly America

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Edited version of a report on a special collaborative conference that brought African educators to the United States, August 11–22, for a Youth Leadership and Educators Conference



In Senegal, just after the Africa Summit, True Mother strongly recommended that America support Africa to grow well as a newborn baby. Following that desire of our beloved True Mother, Heavenly Africa as a younger brother had to go to meet Heavenly America as our older brother and learn from institutional elements of the foundation that True Parents built over more than thirty years in America. With such a motivation, Youth and Students for Peace-Africa made a connection with the US chapter of the Women's Federation for World Peace to host the first Youth Leadership and Educators Conference in collaboration with the US chapters of the Family Federation for World Peace, Universal Peace Federation and Youth and Students for Peace.

To lead twenty-seven people, held in high esteem in their respective nations, to America to learn about character education, youth leadership, leadership by women and entrepreneurship was a wonderful experience. The participants came from

four nations, twenty-three from Côte d'Ivoire, including the secretary general of the National Commission of UNESCO in that nation and twenty-two local regional directors of education. From Kenya came two County Assembly members. From Senegal, the secretary general of the National Youth Council of Senegal attended as did a youth leader from Guyana.

The UN and pursuing good character

The Organizing Committee of the conference comprised Dr. Alan Saunders, Character Education trainer; Denneeze Nelson, with WFWP-New Jersey; Alain Tamelessio, secretary general, UPF-New Jersey; and me, Philbert Seka, president, Youth and Students for Peace-Africa. The opening ceremony of the Youth Leadership and Educators Conference in New York and Washington DC took place at the Africa Union (AU) Headquarters at United Nations in New York City. Taj Hamad had secured the venue at the UN and the Nigerian representative, who is the AU ambassador to the UN, greeted the group. She spoke about character education, service learning and leadership skills training. For the first time ever, we heard a high-level ambassador refer to character education. Taj Hamad and I were the emcees for the ceremony.



Dr. Saunders took over for days two and three of the workshop and did full lectures on character education and leadership training with the support of Prof. Alain Tamelessio, Dr. Kone and me. The participants received the interactive lectures well. We, who given our responsibilities as educators and leaders, continually give orders to other people, suddenly became big students. We attended the workshop like students in school; we came in the morning, took a break at noon, resumed our studies in the afternoon and ended in the evening. We sat listening carefully to all the presenters and took notes of the

lectures. It was an amazing experience for us but seemed satisfying as well for the lecturers. We learned new things in our lives and committed to implementing new ideas in our work.

Dr. Saunders is truly a passionate teacher of character education. He devoted his full time, energy and resources to expressing his profound love and to connecting with the participants' hearts. All the participants requested that he travel to Africa for the training of trainers.



Forms of human interaction

Dr. Kone Idriss, professor of Theology, Personal Development and Conflict Resolution at the Unification Theological Seminary in New York City, spoke on conflict resolution, giving some recipes on how conflicts start, develop and become greater and how to manage and find the appropriate solutions to resolve them. He naturally advocated developing character education in French speaking African countries, such as Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire.

Miihan Stephens gave a presentation focused on a Crane's Club-driven conference and workshop. He explained the different types of entrepreneurs, how they start out and how they become successful. He showed us very simple tools that most of the successful entrepreneurs use to build relationships in business areas and strengthen their networks. We appreciated the section on strategy. The participants enjoyed his presentation and would like him to give an entrepreneurial workshop in their respective countries.

I spoke on using social media as the best way to get the attention of young people. They are means of reaching out to a large community of people to teach them character education. Social media are also useful for raising funds for community service projects.



African and gender connections

The Participants later attended a presentation on African culture and leadership at Essex Community College in Newark, New Jersey, by Dr. Khalifani, professor of African Studies and president of African Studies Association, USA. The lecture was excellent and the participants stayed there for several hours. We connected with his focus on the roots of African culture and the importance of educating youth, black youth, in the ways he advocated.

On the last day, Katerina Connery, vice-president of Women's Federation- USA and a Mathematics teacher at Bridgeport High School in the State of Connecticut, gave an excellent presentation. The women

especially appreciated it. They stated that they would have preferred this presentation at the beginning of the workshop, not at the end. She explained the important role of women and different types of leadership.

The "students" get to work

We had organized the Youth Leadership and Educators Conference to achieve the following goals: 1) To connect Africa and America, following True Mother's recommendation in Dakar for America to support growth in Africa. 2) To substantiate True Parents' vision by raising future global leaders using character education and to strengthen the providence in the nations. 3) To build a strong foundation for YSP Africa to achieve its mission 4) To bring together our providential organizations such as UPF, WFWP and YSP to work as one body as True Mother stated.

At this end, we can say that the conference fulfilled all four points. The program brought twenty-six high level educators and youth leaders from Africa and one person from Guyana, in the Caribbean, to America to learn from resources built up within True Parents' foundation in that nation. The training impressed and inspired the participants. In their testimonies, they have resolved to take the following actions:

The twenty-two educators from Côte d'Ivoire all have resolved to speak to the minister of education about including character education in the Ivorian educational system. They will lead character education training for teachers across the thirty-one local regions of their nation. They are already working on a strategy.

The two participants from Kenya, members of County Assemblies, have decided to hold a leadership and character education workshop for 1,025 youth and woman leaders across all Kenyan cities, April 9–14, 2019, at the University of Bungoma, where they have already met with the university's vice chancellor and the governor of Bungoma. They scheduled a meeting with the Senate Speaker and plan to seek an audience with the deputy president and invite me to talk about YSP and the upcoming youth leadership workshop in Kenya. It will be an occasion to launch YSP at the national level.

The participant from Senegal, a young woman who is secretary general of the Youth National Council of Senegal has already set up a workshop for eighty-five key woman leaders from all parts of Senegal, September 14–16 and October 5–7. The National Youth Council will help to launch YSP in Senegal and organize the leaders of the seventeen thousand youth associations under its governance to receive training for trainers in character education.

The participant from Guyana is an aviation engineer and a youth leader. He has resolved to meet with the head of the government Youth Ministry to organize workshops and service projects in communities. With these programs, we may be able to establish YSP's credibility in Africa and demonstrate our capability in leading transformative projects that affect people's lives and garner nationwide attention.

Finally, seeing the good collaboration between UPF, WFWP and YSP in preparing the program and sharing a common base of interest was remarkable. YSP Africa brought the participants all the way from Africa to the United States. WFWP USA hosted the program, sending invitation letters for visa requests and deploying an operational team in the field. UPF helped with logistics and contacts.

December 20–26, YSP Africa will lead a retreat workshop for 120 schoolteachers from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin in Cape Coast, Ghana.

The Youth Leadership and Educators Conference was not just a conference or a series of lectures but a real workshop where participants and lecturers had the necessary time to interact, exchange, go through presentations in full and have time for questions and answers. The lecturers gave exercises for group discussions. The benefit of the training was twoway, lecturers as well participants learned from each other. It was as if professional educators and youth leaders were attending summer university courses.

Next year, the Youth Leadership and Educators Conference will cover all of Africa, drawing 120 participants. We will hold it at the International Peace Education Center (IPEC) in the US city of Las Vegas. Preparations have begun and people have already manifested interest.

Note that the Youth Leadership and Educators Conference is a step ahead in building an international institute of character education and leadership in Africa to raise future global leaders.