

Interview of Edwin Plekhanov, the FFWPU national leader of Burundi, Africa

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Burundi is a nation undergoing chaos since the announcement that the president would exceed constitutional limits in seeking a third term. Burundi was embroiled in the tribal conflict between Tutsis and Hutus that erupted in neighboring Rwanda in 1994 and caused an astonishing loss of lives.

Question: How does your day begin?

Our day begins with Hoon Dok Hae, of course. We still do Hoon Dok Hae at 5:00 am, because some student center members have to leave for school by 7:00. We wake up 4:30, because they have to prepare themselves. Our Hoon Dok Hae is for an hour. We read *Cheon Seong Gyeong* or Divine Principle. Sometimes, I give some internal guidance, especially Wednesday morning. On Friday mornings, we have Divine Principle practice.

At 7:00, the students go out and one brother goes to work. I stay in the center for people who might come to learn Divine Principle.

Around 10:00, I stand on the street -- immediately, because the center is right on the street -- and I witness to people there. This is how we start our morning.

Question: How is our church progressing in Burundi?

When I was appointed, in December 2011, I did not find any members there. We started with the first member, then came three, then four, five and then we had seven members. In 2012, we sent seven members to the blessing. In 2013, we sent only three members to the blessing. In 2014, which means, yesterday, for Blessing 2015, we sent twenty-one members.

Question: What obstacles do you face?

The main obstacle we have is facilities. For now, we do not have a center, but in an area called Kamenge, we rent a four-bedroom house. One bedroom for the brothers, one for the sisters, one we use as an office and one is where the national leader stays. The sitting room we use as the chapel, where we conduct our Sunday service, morning service and any church related meeting.

Our members are very young; most of them are still students, so the national leader is responsible to pay for the center. Support does not come from any headquarters. We are independent, which means we do it by ourselves.

The rent is US \$300. Some way, every month, I have to get that money. At the same time, I have to take care of my two kids. I am a widow, so I have to take care of all the issues -- my kids' school fees and all of this. In 2014, we almost went bankrupt because for nine months we couldn't pay the rent. We are trying.

We hope that one day we will have members that can start contributing. Otherwise, I was told, "Anyway, if it is not working, report to us and go." We are trying to look at this in a very positive way. Someone might read this and be a bit supportive, come in as a partner in the Burundi providence. We have many difficulties, but we have a lot of potentiality.

Question: Wasn't President Nkurenziza deeply connected with UPF in the past?

President Nkurenziza is the ninth [and current] president of the Republic of Burundi. I would not say "deeply"; it was a kind of win-win... He also wanted something from UPF. He attended, I think, two of our conferences.

We promised to build a big peace center, which we started but didn't finish, about 120 kilometers from the capital. So, we even have a case now with the government of Burundi because we didn't finish this. They are seizing the place. From this, they became a bit reluctant to continue dealing with us.

We have been working with the eighth president of Burundi, Domitien Ndayizeye. He participated in three of our events, here in Korea in 2012, 2013 and 2014. He and his wife participated in the Blessing Ceremony in 2013 as a normal blessed couple -- they drank the holy wine, did the indemnity stick and they went through the five steps of the blessing -- the three-day ceremony... everything correctly. They

do all that a blessed couple is supposed to do because he said that he wants to be like Father.

We wish to work with him, but how can we? We need to have a presence in Burundi; facilities are very important. For example, he said that he wants to attend Sunday service but we cannot receive him in our place, because it is not equal to him. We can do better than we have done until now if we have proper facilities and clear support.



Burundian brides and grooms celebrate the joy of holy blessing

Question: Does Burundi suffer aftereffects of the Tutsi–Hutu clashes?

Of course. That problem is still there. I would not say that the problem in Burundi is like the one in Rwanda. In Burundi, people can speak about their ethnicity, about their background, but the problem is still there. It is pronounced, of course, but it is not as dangerous. The elections will start in May 2015. The current president wants to run again but the constitution does not allow this. The country went through 1993–1996, a period when many people went to the spiritual world and now are trying to get revenge for themselves. This upcoming election could cause the problem to arise again in Burundi.

That's why at the present moment we are not working with UPF in Burundi. We wanted first to work with the Unification Church, to set a clear base, a strong foundation with internal members before we start, this year, 2015, to go a little bit on their street by meeting some of the highest VIPs, to try to see if we can find more John the Baptists. To have people that can speak on our behalf.

Question: What are other hopeful signs that you see?

One hopeful sign is the youth. We need projects that engage the youth. Burundi is very small and lacks infrastructure. One hope would be, for example, to build a school that can provide a good, moral education, something like a civic education that would help the country. If we set up a school that teaches the Divine Principle and Father's thoughts, this could be a basis to move.

One of our targets would be the middle class. Some middle class people, around forty years old, finished their education at some university abroad and have come back. They are well educated and want to do something for the country. This school could embrace them. We could put them on our board and try to go, to move, with those people.

Question: Are you a native Burundian?

No. I'm not from Burundi. I am from Cameroon, where I was born. I worked a bit in Cote D'Ivoire. Then I was sent to the African headquarters where I worked for five years. After that, I was appointed national leader of Burundi.

Question: Would you be willing to talk a bit about your family?

Okay, thank you. I was blessed in 1992. I joined the Unification movement in 1984, in Cameroon, in the north, the Islamic part of Cameroon. I moved from that place when I was blessed with a Rwandan, Mukakamana Sophie. We had two girls. The first one is Jinhee, Edwin Amelia, who is now thirteen. The

younger one is Jinju Viktorya Edwin. She will turn eight years old in June.

Their mom was discovered to have breast cancer, while here in Chung Pyung, she had surgery here but the cancer was in the fourth stage. We went back to Africa. I had to leave the African headquarters to take care of my wife. We went back to Rwanda, her country, because this was a little bit easier. We went to Rwanda on August 11, 2009 and on the 23 of December 2009, she was called back to heaven. She passed away at that time.

I have been taking care of my kids since then. The small one was twenty-one months old at that time. I have been taking care of them by myself in Rwanda. In the midst of all this, I was appointed national leader of Burundi.

Question: My goodness, you have a lot on your shoulders.

Of course, that's true, I do have a lot on my shoulders, but I have to carry on and make sure it works out well.