

UPF's Drissa Kone hosted the African Diaspora Leadership Conference

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New York, NY – The Universal Peace Federation Office of African Affairs hosted the “African Diaspora Leadership Conference” through its Executive Director Drissa Kone on March 26, 2016 at the FFWPU Learning Center in the heart of Manhattan.

Key government, civic and religious leaders of the Ivorian diaspora community in New York were present to support the work of Mr. Kone. At the conference, he reported the primary finding from his doctoral research entitled: “Active Listening” is the key to strengthening relationships and resolving conflict. His paper aims to understand and resolve conflicts as a result of civil wars in his native country, Cote D’Ivoire, through active listening towards genuine reconciliation. *“My studies showed me that this was the practical way to love sacrificially, even when we, ourselves, are hurting. We often feel like we have to say what we think is right, but we often do this at the expense of our relationships. I realized that I have to listen first to understand. If we don’t understand, we can never love and we can never achieve peace.”*



Most of the Ivorian civic and religious leaders in attendance at the conference had participated in Mr. Kone’s doctoral research on the efficacy of active listening as a source of conflict resolution over the past few years. Mr. Kone had reached out to them one by one to invite them to share their hearts and stories, seeking simply to understand rather than to be understood. For Mr. Kone, the conference itself represented the fruits of his research. He was able to gather Ivorians of different ethnicities, religions, and

political affiliations—all touched by the violence of the civil wars in some way—together in one room through the mutual trust and love he had built by actively listening.

Honorable Christophe Kouaou, the Consul General of Cote D'Ivoire to New York who gave a congratulatory remarks said *“To you, my young brother, Mr. Kone, I would like to say I am particularly proud that you recognize the value of forgiveness. That is the foundation of all social life, all community life, both in the diaspora and the Ivorian nation. To you, the leaders of the Ivorian diaspora, I invite you to make the work that our brother has done your own. Please make that work your own. To all the advisors and professors of Mr. Kone, I would like to express my gratitude for supporting him and, by extension, the Ivorian diaspora and nation.”*

Also, Imam Souleymane Konate of the Majid Al-Aqsa Mosque in New York also commented, *“I’m so proud of this young man because the project is a very productive one and he did a good job. Bringing all these people together is a great accomplishment, and the presentation itself was also great. I was sharing with some of the leaders just now, ‘Drissa started it. Let us finish it.’ The choice Drissa gave us today, if we act on it, we will definitely bring our people together in love, peace, and harmony.”*

Supporting the report of Mr Kone is a video and brief presentations by Rev. Richard De Sena, President UPF USA on the topic of reconciliation. He said, *“the Co-Founders of UPF, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his wife Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon always tried to find ways to bring harmony, reconciliation, and ultimately, peace and love.”* Furthermore, he praised Mr. Kone and the participants saying, *“It was great to see Ivoirians of different ethnicities and religions coming together in an environment of tolerance, respect, harmony, and, I would say, love. Mr. Kone has accomplished a great work of peace today.”*

Twenty (20) new Ambassadors for Peace were appointed at the conference which was handed by Rev. De Sena, Mrs. Lynn Walsh, Director of UPF International Office of Marriage and Family Education and Co-chair of the UN’s NGO Committee on the Family in NY and Mr. Kone himself. Afterwards was the signing of a “Peace Charter of the Ivorian Diaspora in New York”

The event was co-hosted by the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) where Mr. Kone is completing his final year on a Doctorate of Ministry program with concentration in peace and justice.