

UPF-France sends Books to Congolese Youth

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French members load a truck with books bound for the Republic of Congo.

On August 2, 2014, a thirty-cubic meter container departed from France toward the port of Pointe Noire, in the republic of Congo. It was full, carrying 820 cartons (seventeen tons) of books, the result of a three-month collection campaign that UPF organized in France in collaboration with WFPW and a few organizations run by our African peace ambassadors.

The books are destined to establish a "peace library," or several libraries located in various schools, in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo.

Rev. Shang Seon Park, the special envoy to the republic of Congo, initiated the project in the spring of 2014.

Concerned to see that so few books were available to young blessed children in his country, he realized that the country had hardly any public libraries that could serve the young people as they grew up. Getting support from well-established Congolese peace ambassadors who could help organize a location for a library, Rev. Park approached the FFWPU International Headquarters to ask whether they could mobilize the French movement to send books to the Congo. Seeing an opportunity for Europe to serve Africa, particularly an African strategic nation (the republic of Congo is one of five strategic nations in Africa), the international headquarters agreed to support the project. The French movement would collect the books and the international headquarters would support the cost of sending a container to the Congo.

Rev. Park came to France, met with the European leader Rev. An, who asked Jean-François Moulinet, the French national leader, to begin research on the project. The Permanent Delegate of Congo at UNESCO, Ambassador Adoua, a UPF contact, was approached. He warmly supported the project and agreed to have the name of the delegation he heads at the top of our group of associations on the letter calling for books. In April, as I was receiving a new mission in France with UPF, I was asked to supervise the project.

Our goal was thus to fill a container with used books in the French language of all kinds -- for children, adolescents and adults -- with a focus on educational books for students and young people. We had about three months to carry out the project.

We began mobilizing peace ambassadors and members in France in early May. Quite a few members took the project to heart and began going door to door asking people for used books. After a month, despite members' enthusiasm, we realized that it would take more than individual door-to-door work to fill a whole container!

In June, we launched a more aggressive and better-organized campaign targeting publishing houses, bookstores, libraries and especially schools.

At the end of the school year, many schools renew their educational material and put old books in storage, sometimes for years. Sometimes they even throw old books away. A few members began visiting schools

systematically.

Within a few weeks, we managed to collect enough books to fill up the container. By mid-July, we had collected over 35,000 books of all kinds. Almost all were used books and some were old but they still contained valuable information.



Happiness arises when helping others.

software to register each book that we collected.

We had volunteers mobilized daily for about two months in the basement of the French headquarters, where we brought all the books, registered and packed them. We then took the boxes to a nearby storage area we had rented. Several members of our second generation, on vacation, came to volunteer and invested a lot of energy in registering, packing and especially carrying the heavy boxes to the storage. Hyo Jin nim's son Shin Chul nim, who had come to France to practice his French, had the chance to participate for a day in the project.

The project helped us as UPF to make new contacts in France. The project interested several donors that are willing to donate more books next year.

Together with a Congolese peace ambassador helping to supervise the project in Congo, Mrs. Rosalie Kama-Niamayoua (a former minister of education), we were able to meet an official at the Bibliothèque François Mitterrand (France's national library), who inquired about our project and gave us advice on establishing libraries in Africa.

We found associations that specialize in collecting used books and sending them abroad. One of them, Le Bouquin Volant, has collected and sent over 860,000 books to French-speaking nations, mostly to Africa, in its ten years of existence. They donated four thousand books to our project and would have donated more if we had a larger container.

We also met, in the process of visiting schools, a group of Congolese expatriates living in France that had set up an association, called ADELIA, to support their country by sending books and educational material for young people. They confirmed the great value of this book project. We gave them some space in the container to send used computers and books to their own project in one region of Congo.

All together, the experience shows that the project will benefit the Congo on the one hand, and our UPF work here in France on the other, by setting up a concrete project, combining both service and education that is attracting respect from all sides. We would like to make it an ongoing UPF project in France and send more books, not only to the Congo, but to other African nations as well.

A note from Shang Seon Park

Members told me they had no libraries to borrow books from and that bookstores usually sold newspapers or magazines and did not sell books for children. I asked how people obtained books they wanted their children to read. By ordering a books from France through the internet was the answer I got. After hearing this, my heart felt very heavy.

Some were new. Publishing houses or bookstores had donated them. Schoolbooks, making up less than half the total volume, stood out as valuable educational materials.

Our African peace ambassadors confirmed that young people in the Congo would appreciate every book, whether on general knowledge or school material. One Congolese man confirmed this in a moving way.

Working in a school we visited that donated hundreds of books, this man reflected about our project. "When I was growing up in Congo thirty years ago, if I had all these books I would be a Nobel Prize winner today," he joked. "We had so few books available in those days that if we heard a friend had a book in another village, we would not hesitate to walk twenty miles to get the book, copy it, and walk twenty miles back to return it..."

Today I see many young people in this school (in France). So many books are available to them but they don't even read them. It is painful!" In order to help the project in Congo, we purchased special

The concept of making a library did not come up from the beginning. I simply thought of bringing some books from France. At an event in Korea, I approached the French national leader. I asked if he could collect books in France. He told me he could try, but that they would not be able to cover the shipping fees to Congo. I told him not to worry about the shipping fees. He promised to collect books. This was how it began.

A second-generation member, a businessman, told me that shipping by container from France was not expensive.

I persuaded the French national leader to collect fifty thousand books to send from France, regarding the shipping costs and expenses that arose in the process of collecting these books, the FFWPU International Headquarters, fortunately, readily accepted to provide the necessary aid, enabling the project to be completed.