

West Africa's International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace Launched

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Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso -- West Africa's branch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace was launched with the backing of the highest levels of government.

The launch took place on August 10, 2016, in the "sacred" hall of Burkina Faso's National Assembly.

It was the central event of a regional International Leadership Conference (ILC) that took place on August 8 to 10, and both the launch and the ILC were organized by UPF in partnership with the National Assembly under the high patronage of Burkina Faso President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.

The regional launch of IAPP was a follow-up to the international inauguration of the parliamentarians' organization by UPF Co-Founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon in Seoul, South Korea, in February 2016 when 150 parliamentarians from around the world met in the South Korean National Assembly.

Honorable Leonce Sanon, a member of Burkina Faso's Parliament, attended the ILC in Korea in February, and was deeply inspired not only by the conference but especially by Dr. Moon's wonderfully articulated vision and plan for a future world of peace and reconciliation. He wanted to go home and quickly start IAPP in his nation, so he was delighted to hear that the regional meeting would take place in his home country.

On August 8, parliamentarians from 23 nations in West Africa came together with Burkina Faso parliamentarians for the welcoming banquet in the Conference and Banquet Hall of the Head of State, which was provided for the occasion by President Kaboré. All banners were prepared with the UPF logo and the National Assembly logo side by side.

A total of 294 people gathered for this welcoming event, including 58 current members of Parliament from Burkina Faso and 64 current members of Parliament from 23 other West African nations.

There were five current and five former presidents and vice presidents of Parliament; the former president of Mali and the former first lady of Benin; four current and seven former government ministers and three current mayors; 12 foreign journalists and 31 Burkina Faso journalists; two ambassadors and nine CEOs of businesses; 10 religious leaders, 12 tribal leaders and two high-ranking military officers. In addition, there were nine UPF leaders from West Africa and 23 leaders of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an affiliated organization.

The banquet was a very important gathering for creating an atmosphere of unity between the members of Parliament of Burkina Faso and the members of Parliament from 23 other nations.

On Tuesday, August 9, the Plenary Session and Official Opening of the ILC 2016 West Africa were held. The schedule started late because of a strong rainstorm early that morning that caused flooding in Ouagadougou.

Most of the same participants as had been there the previous evening finally arrived. During the Opening Session UPF International President Thomas Walsh read the message from UPF Co-Founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon with emotion, eloquence and clarity.

The four sessions in the afternoon were very well attended. Although the rainstorm had caused the program to start late and thereafter to be behind schedule, the participants were enthusiastically involved in every session and even asked that the coffee breaks be suspended.



That evening all the foreign deputies were taken to an Italian restaurant which had been reserved especially for them. Over dinner they strongly bonded with each other, with Dr. Walsh, and with UPF and its ideals. For most of these parliamentarians, it was their first time to attend a UPF event.

Finally, on Wednesday, August 10, the highlight of the gathering was ready to begin: the inauguration of the West African branch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace and, concurrently, the inauguration of the Burkina Faso National Association of Parliamentarians for Peace.

In Burkina Faso, the National Assembly Hall is an especially revered place. One year ago, there was an uprising against the president who had ruled for 36 years. The people wanted a change, but the election process was not respected. So a revolution took place that ousted the president and his government. There were riots and a few people died. The National Assembly was burned down as well as many other government buildings. Now the National Assembly is using a temporary site until the new building can be finished. But this National Assembly venue is revered in Burkina Faso as the symbol of hope, the symbol of the voice of the people and the fight for freedom and justice. To hold this event at this area that the people call the “sacred hall” was very meaningful.

The day before the IAPP launch, the wife of the eldest member of the National Assembly died in Tunisia. Her body was to be laid out at the National Assembly Hall out of respect for this eldest member and activist for Burkina Faso freedom. As they flew her body back to Ouagadougou, all the parliamentarians gathered at the airport. However, they unanimously agreed to postpone her ceremony until all the festivities for the IAPP launch were finished.

The launch was very beautiful. The vice president of the National Assembly presided over the ceremony in the name of Salifou Diallo, president of the National Assembly, who was hospitalized in South Africa. As the announcement was made by the chief of protocol of the House that the meeting was to begin, all the members stood and the vice president came in side by side with Dr. Walsh representing Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon.

Speeches were read by the vice president, by Dr. Walsh, by Honorable Leonce Sanon (president of the Organizing Committee of Parliamentarians of Burkina Faso). A “New Hope Choir” sang the National Anthem of Burkina Faso and then the Hymn for Peace.



Two parliamentarians read speeches endorsing IAPP from their nations, Hon. Jean Claude Simepoungou from Gabon and Hon. Gilbert Bangana from Benin. Honorable Bangana gave an emotional speech in which he recalled that even as a young university student in Benin, he had the chance to study the UPF Peace Principles. He couldn't understand at that time the importance of what he was learning and left for France to continue his studies. Now, he said, he is delighted that he can be reconnected to this truth that he says will change the world.

After signing the resolution, the participants were invited outside, where they enjoyed refreshments provided by the Burkina Faso National Assembly. This was followed by a ceremony in which the top officials of the National Assembly and UPF planted trees that will be the beginning of a “Garden of Peace.”

Finally, the Peace Road 2016 Burkina Faso began directly from the garden. Accompanied by 50 cyclists, 12 persons riding horses, 20 motorcyclists and a large truck with banners and music, all the parliamentarians rode in buses down the main road from the National Assembly to the Place of the Revolution. A ceremony was held, emphasizing the reunification of the Koreans and peace to begin from this point. There was dancing and singing and festivities, and finally ILC 2016 Burkina Faso came to a close.

The ILC events were covered by nine radio reporters, seven television journalists, five online journalists and 11 daily newspaper reporters.

All the news outlets interviewed almost all of the deputies from West Africa one by one. Also, the RTB Burkina Faso national TV station carried all three days of the event and continued to play the entire meeting during the night, repeating it several times.

Many members of Parliament, both from Burkina Faso and other nations in West Africa, were deeply moved by Dr. Moon's determination and focus on educating the young people of the world.

During the first session of the ILC, a speech about the Founders' vision was given, which explained that the only way to bring peace to West Africa is to help to create healthy, God-centered families. One of the participants exclaimed that this idea “took her breath away,” she was so moved. She commented that she had never understood this before.