

## UPF Biel/Bienne, Switzerland's online commemoration of Africa Day 2020

Chantal Komagata  
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Biel/Bienne, Switzerland -- An online commemoration of Africa Day was devoted to discussions of violence against women and government corruption.

More than 120 people participated in the online event, which UPF-Switzerland held on May 25, 2020.

Titled "Contribution of the African Diaspora to Peace Here and There," the event provided an opportunity to move toward the creation of "a human family united in interdependence and mutual prosperity on the basis of universally shared values," taking into account that each member of the diaspora is between two worlds and can contribute to peace on both sides, by investing with talents, dreams, and resources. In particular, two almost prophetic themes of Africa Day 2019 were mentioned: the replacement of the CFA franc by an African currency, and the empowerment of women; those topics have proved strikingly topical throughout the year.

The Swiss chapter of UPF has celebrated Africa Day for 10 years with various organizations, particularly in the bilingual French-German administrative district of Biel/Bienne. Africa Day marks the foundation of the Organisation of African Unity on May 25, 1963, and the UPF events show the contribution and cultural richness of the African diaspora.

For this year's event, messages and panels were interspersed with video clips giving a glimpse of previous events, including children's games, music, dances, skits and food. However, this year, due to the pandemic, new technologies had to be used. One advantage of meeting online was the possibility to bring together personalities from all over the world while avoiding travel.

Chantal Chételat Komagata, secretary general of UPF-Switzerland, and Johnson Belangenyi, director of the non-profit organization Swiss-Exile, acted as moderators. They welcomed the participants and explained the use of the webinar, in particular the possibility of receiving simultaneous French-English translation. The hosts stressed the importance of reflecting together on the situation in Africa and contributing to better bilateral integration by respecting and appreciating each other, overcoming all kinds of prejudices, feelings of superiority or inferiority as well as discriminatory experiences.

Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF International, spoke about our responsibility and need to repent while being more attentive to youth and women. Most of the countries that have responded well to COVID-19 are those ruled by women, he said. In all the countries visited, he said, UPF International supports the empowerment of women, who represent half of the world's population, and the importance of integrating them into solutions. He also stressed the need for countries to network to overcome crises, and the merits of creating a free trade area on the African continent, which is the largest in terms of participating countries. Finally he welcomed plans to stop arms and to have free elections in 20 African countries in 2020, and he praised the unifying role of the African Union. He concluded his message with a

warning against misinformation about Africa before wishing that Heavenly Parent would bless all of Africa.

The first panel, which featured French speakers, dealt with violence against women. Naïma Serroukh, founder and director of Tasamouh, posed questions to the three panelists: Gabriella Dia, coordinator of projects for peace, equal opportunities and justice; Tuncay Kaptan, a social worker; and Amal Bouchiba, a sociologist.



Violence against women, even that which is non-physical, can be understood as disrespect. In some countries, the problem is not taken seriously. Violence against women is the most common human rights violation and an obstacle to gender equality.

The relationship of power between men and women, which seems normal to many, aims at subjugating women, who are understood as having a subordinate status, both in Europe and in Africa.

The situation of women in war, particularly during rape, leaves physical and psychological trauma such that professional experts are needed to help overcome it. Just talking to these women and allowing them to express themselves is already a challenge, because the trauma is linked to shame and loss of self-esteem.

How to denounce and sensitize women to these facts? It is necessary to bring the skills of the diaspora to the country of origin to tackle the subject openly and eliminate taboos.

The panelists then addressed the issue of violence suffered by women in single-parent families. Especially if they are migrants lacking education or knowledge of the country's language, they cannot bear the responsibility of raising their children alone. A solid union brings much more support to both partners and children, which can be extrapolated to the level of sustainable communities. The context of the single-parent family is very different, depending on the support of society, and can also apply to a single man. In Africa, where it is often the man who manages everything, a woman on her own will have to fend for herself with the help of her children. Shelters should be established to care for these women and their families so that they can empower themselves, rebuild themselves and prevent a vicious circle.

In closing, the panelists spoke of different possibilities for the African diaspora to support Africa: staying in relationship, recognizing the beauty and strength of African women, and supporting them to claim their rights. At the end, a series of poignant slides depicted women and girls who made the gesture "STOP or NO to violence" to show their moral support for all the women who suffer from this scourge.

The next panel, in English, discussed solutions to overcome corruption. Moderated by Issa Abdullahi, co-founder of the Swiss African Forum, it brought together experts in this field: Christa Kamga, who worked for UNESCO and is active in the media field in South Korea; Philip Ebalu, vice president for West Africa of the power-sector company METSCO; and Carl Bjertnes, co-founder of the investment cooperative SEEDS.

In a brief introduction to the theme, Mr. Abdullahi observed that failing to deal decisively with corruption in its internal and external dimensions increases the level of corruption in Africa. Corruption affects

everyone, and no nation is completely free from it. Its impact is felt everywhere, and it seems that the more we fight it, the more it responds violently.

In the discussion that followed, corruption was defined from different angles -- in particular, systemic (endemic) corruption due to weaknesses in an organization or process, when public officials act in a corrupt manner within a system that is supposed to prevent corruption. The participants also referred to corruption as a form of dishonesty, an offense by people in positions of authority to advance their own interests or those of their ethnic group, and found that it was a pandemic that affects the human heart.



All the panelists agreed that it had become a big concern, given the damage it caused each year. They highlighted certain terms common to this threat, which include undue influence, abuse of power for private benefit, inflation of contracts, favoritism, bribery, fraud, kickbacks, embezzlement, extortion, money laundering, obstruction of justice -- all of which pose a threat to good governance and social standards. They highlighted one of its most perverse attributes, greed, which, by denying transparency, weakens the main drivers of a strong nation: its institutions.

Finally they mentioned some solutions and suggestions to governments to fight against corruption:

1. Live for the sake of others, especially in public service.
2. Show zero tolerance for corrupt practices by fighting them and demonstrating commitment to good governance and exemplary leadership.
3. Create and strengthen anti-corruption institutions and guarantee the transparency of all transactions or businesses.
4. Establish severe sanctions to fight corruption.
5. Promote an international agreement to support and protect any whistleblower who leads to the disclosure of any form of corruption.
6. Repatriate identified stolen funds without delay or preconditions.
7. Educate individuals, because any system depends on the individual's state of mind, will and personal integrity.
8. Address the injustice that laws are made by the powerful for the poor.
9. Dispense fast justice (justice delayed is justice denied).
10. Encourage measures to raise public awareness on the ills of corruption.

In conclusion, governments must demonstrate an undeniable political will and commitment to fight corruption by ensuring that the private sector is clean and transparent and that civil society, which monitors all stakeholders, acts and reports with a sense of responsibility and objectivity.

A question-and-answer session was hosted by Olivier Gravrand, Ing., a civilian who has participated in projects in Africa.

Question: How should a woman act after experiencing violence?

Answer: If she lives in an environment attentive to what is happening and can avoid isolation, she will be able to cope, even at the hands of a narcissistic person. The crux is finding people whom one can trust to confide in and who will not do anything that could make the situation worse.



Question: How do we get more women into positions of power?

Answer: Many women have the capacity to change things and carry out projects, but they have to be in the right place at the right time.

Question: Does corruption also stem from differences in values in different countries?

Answer: Even in countries with common values and laws, greed for personal gain is a pandemic that affects governance. Awareness and education of values are essential in every community, state and between states.

Question: How to overcome the cycle of intra-domestic violence?

Answer: It takes tougher laws in Switzerland and in Africa, where some countries do not even recognize economic and sexual violence. What is needed are foster homes, specialists and a personal process of both partners, who must learn to break taboos and overcome their limitations.

Question: What can Switzerland do to reduce corruption emanating from within?

Answer: Switzerland for a long time has been able to hide behind laws and the lack of transparency. New technologies should help avoid crimes like child labor, and taxing all transactions would eliminate speculation. The situation is improving, and by more tightly controlling transactions, Switzerland is no longer inducing African leaders to keep their money in Swiss banks. Switzerland also can set a good example through its Federal Council, balanced between men and women of different affiliations and backgrounds, capable of making consensual decisions in a multicultural society, and demonstrating fair diplomacy. From the internal point of view, there is a process of development of individual and collective consciousness. Actions that once were considered "normal" -- for example, between men and women -- are no longer permissible because women are demanding greater respect.

Finally, the UPF-Switzerland secretary general thanked all the participants and everyone involved in organizing the webinar, including the technical facilitators, Konstantin Krylov and Michel Reymond; translators Noémie Komagata and Ye-Bonne Koyama; the moderators of the two panels and their speakers, as well as Johnson Belangenyi. She recalled the message of one of the videos, that the 21st century would be the century of Africa, and she mentioned that meetings would follow to discuss current topics at greater length.