

UPF Biel, Switzerland Holds Migration Discussion on Africa Day

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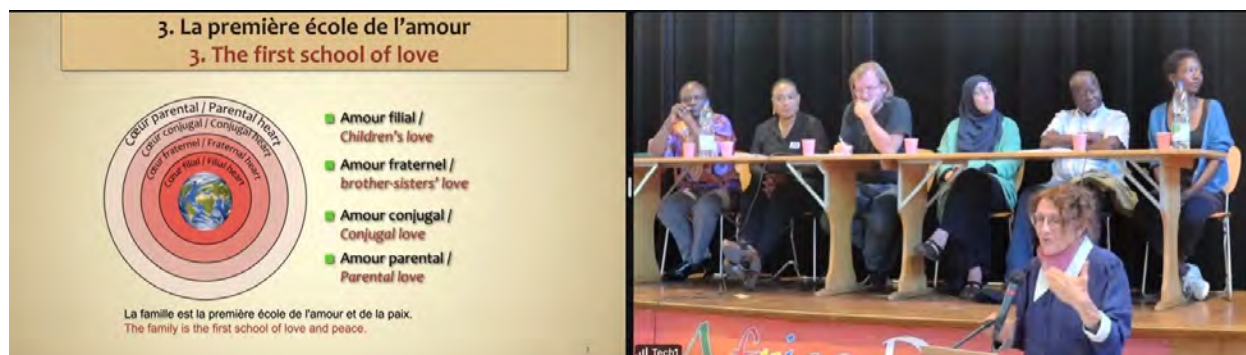


Biel, Switzerland - UPF commemorated Africa Day 2022 with a discussion on the theme "How to Prevent Forced Migration?"

To the sound of Koffi Owoussi's singing and playing of the jembé drum, approximately 40 participants of various origins and ages filled the meeting room of the Saint-Paul Church in Biel on May 25, 2022. Approximately 20 additional participants connected to the meeting online.

Chantal Chételat Komagata, UPF-Europe coordinator, began by thanking the leaders of the organizations that contributed to the commemoration of the 59th anniversary of the signing of the Organisation of African Unity agreements, the forerunner of the African Union.

To launch the chosen theme, "How to Prevent Forced Migration?" - in connection with the migration flow caused by traumatic events - she presented a twenty-minute video on migration. This video shocked, challenged and opened hearts to the discussion theme by presenting statistics, information on the Schengen area, striking images of the reality of migration from Africa to Europe and, finally, a message from an African in the diaspora who has returned to contribute to his native land in a significant way.



Appearing online from Geneva, H.E. Léopold Ismaël Samba, ambassador plenipotentiary and extraordinary of the Central African Republic to Switzerland, the United Nations and international organizations, then presented the history of migration, its causes and solutions.

Among other things, he emphasized a more active cooperation of the diaspora, who are endowed with many skills and useful resources. He urged them to create projects that bring hope to the local population.

Aicha Bacha, a doctor of political and social sciences and secretary general of the World Movement of Pan-African Women Leaders, appeared online from Belgium. She emphasized the importance of supporting women, who have remained hidden for too long, to develop their leadership skills and manage projects.

The thematic panel was composed of six prominent persons from the region:

- Armando Okito, president of Collectif des Associations de Migrants;
- Véronique Mbwebwe, a jurist who spoke at the United Nations during Africa Day 2014;
- Luc N. Ramoni, the pastor of the Reformed Church of Biel, who was raised in Madagascar until the age of 10;

Naïma Serroukh, a jurist, founder and president of the migrant support organization Tasamouh;
Mamadou Diop, a former city councilor;
Olga Madjinodji, an integration specialist with the specialized integration service of Biel.

The panelists reflected on the four themes chosen to prevent forced migration:



Education for good governance: Many people flee families, societies and countries to get away from tyrants, discrimination, or wars of interest. We need education that empowers citizens and creates equal opportunities for all, so that they view each other with respect, share power, overcome corruption, and communicate in a non-violent manner. As in Switzerland, citizens must be encouraged to support the smooth running of politics and society at all levels of government. In addition, they must learn to form governments made up of competent people of diverse ethnicities, beliefs, and backgrounds who can provide solutions that are accepted by a non-homogeneous population.

Establishment of sustainable enterprises: This is one of the key points to avoid forced migration, both by providing work and income to the population and by taking care of the environment. An example of partnership cited was to gather funds from people in the diaspora and invest them in projects that serve the most disadvantaged populations in different countries.

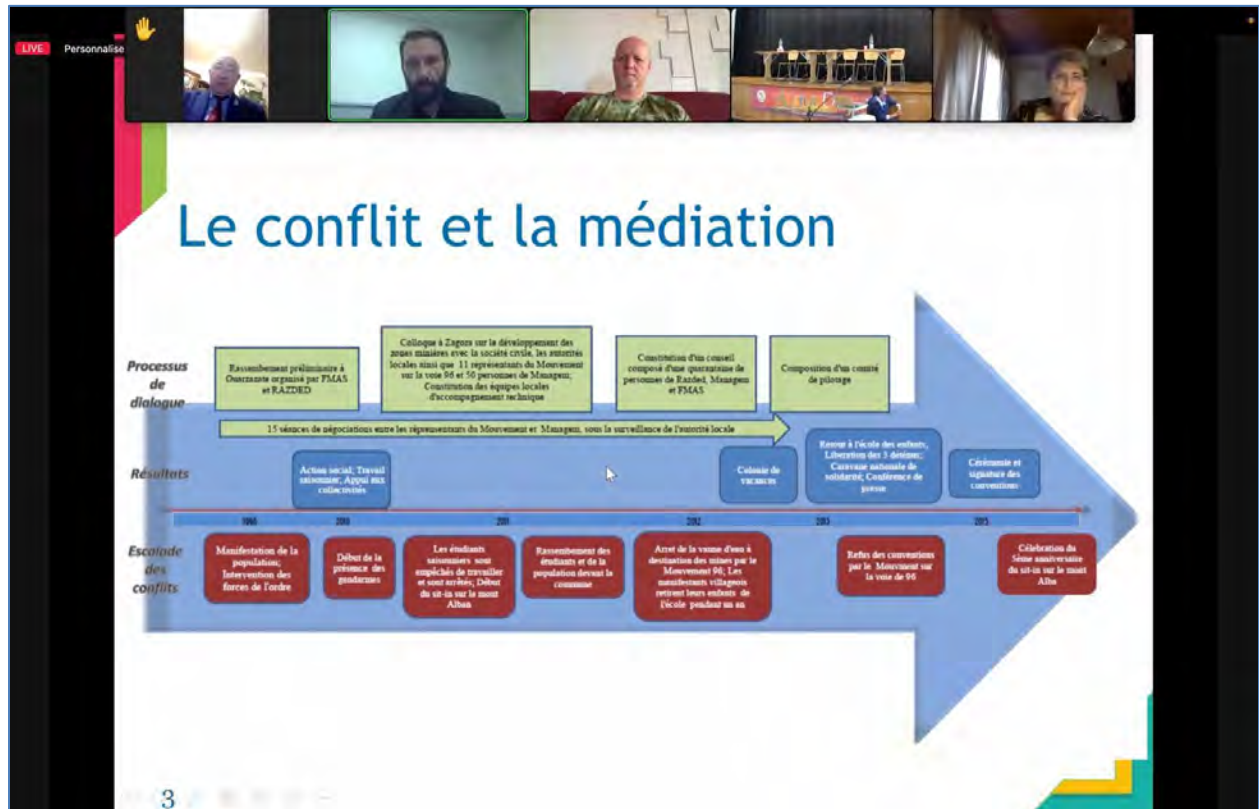


Universal Values for Peace: A short presentation of UPF's five universal principles provided an ideal view of the world, considering the common origin of the human family: the source of creation, the Heavenly Parent. Since all humanity desires happiness, a balance must be achieved between the satisfaction of physical needs and spiritual aspirations. This is possible only in a family that cultivates filial, fraternal, and parental love for all, and conjugal love in the couple. This kind of family represents the primary condition for peace. It is also in a community made up of such families that the capacity to practice true altruism is gradually developed at the national and world levels. Cooperation among people of different backgrounds and beliefs leads to the emergence of a harmonious human family.

Different views were expressed by the speakers on the role of Christianity and Islam in teaching and practicing universal values intrinsic to religions. In particular, policies to reduce inequality and injustice prevent forced migration.

Information about the difficult reception of migrants: In the video, we see that even people who have

gone through hell on their journey to find happiness elsewhere, without succeeding, would still try their luck. This is also a migration forced by a dream stronger than the fear of death, by the hope of a better life elsewhere and a source of income for the families back home. This dream ignores the hardships at arrival, the undignified work, the difficulty of collecting funds to send, with high bank fees, the dependence and expectations of families, the lies to avoid shame. The work in the migration sector is a challenge because the rules dictated by Schengen are opposed to the desire to welcome and live together. In Switzerland, however, the population has managed to unite to avoid rejecting some people.



The meeting ended with interaction with the public and the presentation of projects.

Pascal Gemperli spoke about two projects supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs: mining mediation in Tunisia and Morocco, in which he helped to overcome disputes between stakeholders.

Yvonne Tossou, from Benin, spoke about her project for the production of fruit juice and dried fruit, which allows an entire population to live.

Ousseynou Dioume presented a project, not yet initiated because of lack of funds, of a Medical Caravan through the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Elisabeth Loko Vignon from Geneva spoke about CATNA (Cercle d'Actions par les Thérapies Naturelles) which consists of creating a botanical garden with curative plants thanks to ancestral wisdom.

Finally, Koffi Owoussi, an agronomist from Biel, spoke about his production of edible mushrooms in Togo, which helps to overcome the lack of protein and to feed even the smallest children.

The event ended shortly after 8 p.m. for the 20 or so participants watching online. The remaining 40 or so participants in the hall took the opportunity to share their views and discuss possible cooperation while enjoying refreshments.