

## WFWP USA: It's Time for Africa to Rise and Shine - Pan-African Conference

Angelika Selle  
August 8, 2020



While the United States is wrestling with multilevel challenges due to Covid-19, racial tensions, political divisions and more, a significant forum and pan-African conference took place that struck a more hopeful note. It put the spotlight on the African continent not only to address the pain of people of African descent here in America, but also to take an encouraging look at the motherland of Africa.

Mrs. Helina Mekonnen is the founder of CHASE THE DREAM: Culture, Art and Beauty and hostess of this annual conference that brings together people of Africa and African descent to celebrate their common roots and the culture and art of Africa. This year, she did not allow Covid-19 to cancel her gathering but rather was able to expand the event to a global audience via technology.

As a Global Friend and partner of the Global Women's Peace Network USA (GWPN), Mrs. Mekonnen invited WFWP USA President Angelika Selle to share a special greeting in the first part of this virtual global conference on August 1, 2020.



The conference theme was AFRICA: IT'S TIME TO SHINE -- GLOBAL DIASPORA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VIABLE SOLUTIONS and featured as the keynote speaker H.E. Dr. Cyril K. Hunte, Guyana's high commissioner to South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The two-hour event was aired live on Facebook as the first part of a two-day conference. The second part was held on August 8.

After heartfelt opening remarks by Mrs. Mekonnen and an encouraging prayer by Gerald Islar remembering victims of Covid-19, President Selle was invited to share greetings and thoughts on the theme of "Africa: It's Time to Rise and Shine" and also to explain about the Global Women's Peace Network (see [video](#) of Mrs. Selle's speech at the conference; she is introduced at the 17th minute of the video and appears again at 1 hour 43 minutes).

In his 30-minute keynote address, Commissioner Hunte pointed out Africa's current problems and challenges as a result of European colonialism, exploitation and prejudice, the remnants of which still affect the continent's infrastructure, ability to travel, and economy today. He called on Africans to now take ownership of their destinies and find creative ways to improve their situation and also to conquer the issue of self-hate, implanted in them by centuries of white European colonial rule. His talk stirred comments from the live participants, many confirming the issues he spoke of, with other voices reminding the audience that there is also tribalism and ethnic cleansing going in Africa at this very moment.

So, where do we go from here, the audience and panelists wondered. One woman participant agreed with a comment that it is time to go beyond the past and also for Africans and people of African descent to look at themselves. It was also acknowledged during the discussion that women and mothers play an important role in re-educating the next generation on all sides.

Mrs. Mekonnen graciously thanked all the speakers, participants and organizers for a very successful and hopeful first virtual conference.

In a special message of thanks to President Selle, Mrs. Mekonnen acknowledged the valuable comments and vision she had shared, which introduced a wider perspective that helped contribute to an honest and productive discussion afterward (see [note of thanks](#)).



### DAY TWO of the conference, August 8, 2020

The second part of this virtual conference (see [recording](#)), which was held exactly one week later, was attended by WFP Southeast Regional Director Myrna Lapres, who shared her personal reflections of the experience.

Mrs. Lapres was impressed with the vision of Ms. Mekonnen's organization and the conference to reconnect with the rich history of the African cultures and create a rich network between people

of African descent living in the continent and other parts of the world. She enjoyed the musical performances, as well as the art show and a pre-recorded fashion show.

The featured speaker was renowned Kenyan Professor P.L.O. Lumumba, of PLO Lumumba Foundation, who is passionately working towards a united Africa. A lawyer, Dr. Lumumba spoke eloquently about the impressive culture and history that existed in Africa prior to enslavement and colonization. A staunch Pan-African, Dr. Lumumba reminded everyone of the importance of connecting that history. He shared the tale of a farmer who took a young eagle from its nest and raised it with his chickens. One day, a naturalist came along and told the farmer that he had an eagle among his flock to which the farmer replied, "But this eagle walks like a chicken, eats like a chicken, even thinks like a chicken." The naturalist picked up the eagle, carried it away from the farm, lifted it high and the eagle soared upward and out of sight. He said, "Once an eagle, always an eagle."

Mrs. Lapres was inspired by Dr. Lumumba's many examples and stories about his and others efforts to support all Africans to remember who they are and soar upward.

Yes, it is indeed time for Africa to Rise and Shine!