

Niamey, Niger: UPF attends the African Union's 12th Extraordinary Summit

Lynn Walsh
July 7, 2019



Niamey, Niger -- Around 4,500 delegates and guests—including 32 heads of state and more than 100 government ministers—attended the African Union's 12th Extraordinary Summit from July 4 to 7, 2019. Dr. Thomas Walsh, chair of UPF-International; Dr. Tageldin Hamad, vice president of UPF; Kathy Rigney, chair of UPF-Africa; and Paterné Zinsou, secretary general of UPF-West Africa were graciously invited as NGO Observers to the AU Summit by the government of Niger. During the summit, UPF-International co-sponsored a side event on the empowerment of African youth.

The 2019 AU Summit was truly exceptional and historical as the African nations launched the "operational phase" of a landmark free-trade agreement called the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). This is the largest trading bloc since World Trade Organization was created in 1994. The AU estimates that the agreement—which reduces tariffs between African nations—will lead to a 60% boost in intra-African trade by 2022. Currently African countries trade only about 16% of their goods and services among one another, compared to 65% among European countries.

AU Commission Chairman H.E. Moussa Faki remarked that an "old dream is coming true, the founding fathers must be proud," adding that this would create "the greatest trading area in the world." Niger's president, H.E. Mahamadou Issoufou, hailed this agreement as "the greatest historical event for the African continent since the creation of the Organization of African Unity in 1963," referring to the AU's predecessor. Amaka Anku, Africa analyst at Eurasia Group, stated that although the AfCFTA is "still a long way from taking off," it is an important and positive step.

Throughout the summit, the UPF delegation had opportunities to meet leaders, including H.E. Muhammadu Buhari, president of Nigeria; H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa, president of South Africa; and H.E. Amina J. Mohammed, deputy secretary general of the United Nations. They also met with Dr. Akinwumi Adesina, the president of the African Development Bank who received the 2019 Sunhak Peace Prize, an affiliate project of UPF. Tageldin Hamad was impressed by the organization of the summit and commented, "Compliments are due to the president and government of Niger." He was especially moved by palpable excitement and hope energized by this new development of intra-African economic collaboration: Overall, there was a general air of enthusiasm in anticipation of new cooperation and economic and social advancement throughout Africa.