

UPF Argentina and Africa House celebrated Africa Day 2018 in Buenos Aires

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Buenos Aires, Argentina -- On May 30, UPF and Africa House Argentina (1) held a celebration of Africa Day 2018 in the Salón Dorado ("Golden Hall") in Buenos Aires. The event was also organized to commemorate the 2015-2024 International Decade for People of African Descent: "Recognition, Justice and Development," proclaimed by UN General Assembly resolution 68/237. Around 200 million people of African descent live in the Americas.

Buenos Aires city legislator Mrs. Carolina Estebarena gave the opening remarks. She expressed her desire to support all ethnic groups in Buenos Aires and the African community, in particular. She also praised Nelson Mandela, who would have turned 100 this year. "He made a major contribution, and I believe he has joined us for this celebration," she said.

Ambassador for Peace Mrs. Irene Ortiz Teixeira, president of Africa House, expressed appreciation for UPF's work to "celebrate a whole continent." Another speaker, the daughter of an African woman from Cape Verde, said that Africa is "nothing more and nothing less than the mother continent." A poem by David Diop, one of the most celebrated French West African poets of the 20th century, was read.

Afterwards, another documentary was shown, "As a Peace-Loving Global Citizen: Senegal Peace Declaration for a New Africa," created by Korean TV station MBCNET. The documentary addresses the conflicts in the African continent during the "Atlantic Age" (from the 16th century to the middle of the 20th century) and follows the development of the Africa Summit which took place in Senegal in January, titled "New Africa: Interdependence, Mutual Prosperity and Universal Values." UPF and the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) organized this summit in cooperation with the government of Senegal, under the presidency of H.E. Macky Sall, and the National Assembly of Senegal.

Afterwards, participants watered an olive tree in a ceremony celebrating hope and the commitment to life and peace. Mrs. Ortiz Teixeira from the Africa House and Mr. Miguel Werner, president of UPF-Argentina began the ceremony. Then, representatives of government (diplomats, politicians), religion, and civil society joined. Each participant shared a few words about integration and peaceful coexistence among peoples and cultures.

Government representatives included: Mr. Hipolytte Basi Ngabo, advisor to the D.R. Congo Embassy; Mrs. Adriana Boccalandro, councilor of San Vicente, Buenos Aires province; and Mrs. Marianela López, councilor of Hurlingham, Buenos Aires province.

Religious representative included: Mr. Leonardo Allegue, from the Umbanda Community Agrupación Social, Cultural y Religiosa Africanista y Umbandista; Elder John Switzer and Janice, from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; Mrs. Faiza Yahia, from the Islamic community; Mr. Fray Jorge Bender, guardian of the Saint Francis of Assisi's Abby; Archbishop Eric Escala, from the Orthodox Anglican

Episcopal Church; and pastors Juan Carlos Varela and Mara, from the Cristo es la Roca ("Jesus is the Rock") Ministry.

Among the representatives from civil society were: Mrs. Ana María Sanchis, president of the Hispanic Union of Writers (Unión Hispanomundial de Escritores); Mrs. Ana Inés Avruj, a member of UPF-Argentina's Peace Council; Mrs. Patricia Pitaluga, president of Civil Society Acercando Naciones; Mrs. Kessinee Vorawatnchai, representing the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP)-Argentina; Mrs. Sergina Da Boa Morte, from A Turma Da Bahiana, an Argentinian-Brazilian cultural association; Mrs. Celia Carnovale, from the Association "Amigos del Museo Guillermo Hudson;" Mr. Guillermo Vázquez, from Lucis Foundation; Mrs. Silvia Carranza, president of CILSA; and Mrs. Susana Etcheverri, president of Asociación ADN.

The olive tree can live for centuries, and it is used as a symbol of peace and prosperity in sacred books from many different spiritual traditions. These plants can be found in the Middle East, Southern Europe, and Northern Africa.

During the musical performance, dances were performed by Falak Nur as well as by a musical ensemble from Northwest Africa, comprised of some members of Wananko, a group directed by Gali Camara, an artist from Guinea who lives in Argentina.

The emcee was Mr. Emanuel Sayavedra, a member of UPF-Argentina's Peace Council, who gave a brief background on Africa Day. The Day was established on May 25, 1963 after 32 representatives of African nations met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to establish the Organization of African Unity, now known as the African Union. Since May 25 is a holiday in Argentina, Africa Day is celebrated on another date in the country. Several people who sent messages that were read at the event were Mrs. Silvia Giacoppo, a senator from Jujuy province; and Hon. Humberto Benedetto, a Mercosur parliamentarian. Both are members of the IAPP. Also in attendance was Mrs. Pamela Malewicz, assistant secretary of Human Rights and Cultural Diversity for Buenos Aires city. The event was supported by various organizations (2).

This day was an opportunity to learn about African culture and its contribution to the independence movement, an inspiration to keep working for the inclusion of all peoples and individuals, an aim expressed in the Preamble of the Argentine Constitution: "promoting the general welfare and securing the blessings of liberty to ourselves, to our posterity, and to all men in the world who wish to dwell on Argentine soil: invoking the protection of God, source of all reason and justice."

It was also an opportunity to heal the painful past of the continent that suffered the most during the "Atlantic Age," filled with slavery, colonialism and theft. In this global, interdependent world, it is the duty of peacemakers to uphold a sense of community. This is a new age where we need to strengthen our commitment to peaceful coexistence for sustainable development.

The celebration highlighted African values. The Ubuntu philosophy, summarized in the proverb "I am because we are," is a South African ethic of loyalty and compassion on the basis of our common humanity. Nelson Mandela promoted this ethic when he was elected President of South Africa after he served 27 years in prison. Living by this philosophy, Mandela served as an example of forgiveness and empathy despite hatred. Ubuntu promotes unity among individuals and ethnic groups in order to achieve the common good.

Notes:

(1) Africa House was founded in 1995 to keep the history and culture of the African continent alive; and to help Africans and their descendants who arrive in Argentina. In 2014, it was recognized by the Buenos Aires City Legislature for its social, cultural, and historical work.

(2) Supporting organizations: Foundation for International Communities; WFWP-Argentina; Civil Society Acercando Naciones; América Madre – International Cultural Institution; Hispanic Union of Writers (Unión Hispanomundial de Escritores) – Buenos Aires City; Cultural Movement aBrace of Entre Ríos – Argentina; SADE – Southern Buenos Aires; Sipea Argentina Infanto Juvenil – Santa Fe; Marina Mercante University; Security and Crime Prevention Council (Buenos Aires City); Initiative "Promueve Paz" - Rotary Club Villa Sarmiento; Olivos Mi Barrio, a digital magazine; and Comedia Negra of Buenos Aires.