

Peace and Development in Africa - Reflections on the 2019 Sunhak Peace Prize

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"The coming time is the age of one world under God. God is working for this kind of world and will always help those people who are working for the same goal. However, there are many people who want to live in that kind of world, but do not want to participate in God's providence to help make it a reality." - Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon



Sunhak Peace Prize laureate Waris Dirie

When you think about Africa, what do you think of? For myself, I think of a place full of contradictions. It is the cradle of humanity, where our human ancestors originated, Mother Africa. Yet most countries in Africa have a long and tumultuous history of brutality from realities such as colonialism and the international slave trade, stripped of the human labor and natural resources which have enriched countries outside of the continent. Such a history of exploitation and abuse has had far-reaching consequences

today. Many countries in Africa are still plagued by war, civil unrest, economic instability, poverty, disease, and conflict. Attempts to improve are often marred and stifled by corruption and inequality.

However, Africa is also filled to the brim with potential, beautiful and diverse. Rich with natural resources - minerals, wood, diamonds, gold, oil, and much, much more - as well as fertile rivers, lakes, and farmlands, African countries could develop phenomenally with the right input and thoughtful investment. Africa also has some of the most stunning landscapes and biodiversity on the planet, from the jungles, to the savannah, mountains, and several natural wonders such as Victoria Falls. Over 30 million tourists visit Africa each year to enjoy these marvels.



Dr. Akinwumi Adesina Sunhak Peace Prize laureate

Given all the diverse realities Africans face in this century, I was particularly excited to see the announcement of the 2019 Sunhak Peace Prize awardees. Founded in 2015 by Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the Sunhak Peace Prize was launched with a goal to "help resolve worldwide suffering, conflict, poverty, and threats to the environment by promoting a comprehensive, future-oriented vision of peace." Awarded every two years, each award follows a theme. This year's theme was "Peace and Human Development in Africa" and was given to Dr. Akinwumi Ayodeji Adesina from Nigeria and Ms. Waris Dirie from Somalia. The laureates were presented the prestigious award at a very moving and joyful ceremony on Saturday, February 9 in Seoul, Korea.

At a time when we are bombarded with negative news and images which seem to point to the hopelessness of humanity - particularly in the United States, we seem to hear only the negative stories about Africa - it is quite refreshing to hear from a man and woman who have had such a widespread positive impact on improving people's lives for the better.

Dr. Adesina is currently the president of the African Development Bank and for several years he has been leading Africa's development through agricultural innovation and promoting good governance. During his acceptance speech, he pointed out the very simple yet profound truth in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples in which the first line was, "give us this day our daily bread." How much hinges on that basic need to be well fed, yet how much is lost due to corruption and war? He pointed out that while today over 850 million people are hungry and over 150 million children are malnourished, the UN estimates that a whopping \$3 trillion per year is lost to corruption globally, money which could be used to feed our children. Efforts to educate and empower are useless if people are not first fed and healthy.

His passion for feeding those in need and creativity to get the job done shone through as he recounted his experience as Minister of Agriculture in Nigeria. He helped cut out middle men who were getting rich off of government contracts and gave the power to buy and sell into the hands of farmers. They used a very simple tool, the cellphone, by developing an app through which farmers can buy seeds and fertilizers directly from suppliers, as well as sell their products. As Africa is heavily reliant on agriculture, this had a tremendous impact on people's lives. One woman proudly showed him her phone and said, "Now we can live with pride." He concluded with a rallying call to turn our spears into pruning hooks as the Bible advises. The entire audience stood to their feet to celebrate all the work and investment Dr. Adesina

represents.

The second awardee, Ms. Waris Dirie, had a much different background and focus, but no less passionate and driven to help others, especially women and girls in Africa. Ms. Dirie was the first person to publicize the horrific nature of female genital mutilation (FGM) to the world and has since worked tirelessly for its eradication.

During the ceremony she shared very openly her story of growing up in a nomadic family in Somalia and the simplicity and beauty of her life there. However, when she was only five years old, she experienced FGM performed by her mother and grandmother. There was no anesthesia and no medical professional to perform this dangerous and unnecessary procedure. She was left with her legs tied together bleeding, in extreme agony, and heartbroken. As a young child filled with hope and dreams, how can she comprehend why such violence was done to her? When her father introduced her to a much older man as her future husband, when she was just 13, she vowed to leave Somalia to escape the atrocities she'd experienced. Her journey took her to England, where she eventually became a world-renowned model. However, even with fame and fortune, she never forgot the little girl she was and the promise she made to herself that she will fight against FGM. With the world platform, she was able to open the public's eyes about FGM and rally the international cause to ban its practice.



As we all know, even when laws are passed, it takes time to change people's perceptions and deeply-rooted cultural practices. FGM is performed on millions of young girls, primarily in Africa, each year. Thus, Ms. Dirie did not stop there. She continues to work with girls and families to educate on the harms of FGM, both physical and psychological. Her foundation also provides reconstructive surgery for victims as well as trauma counseling so they can recreate their lives.

Though her speech highlighted the multifaceted atrocity that is FGM, she concluded by saying that only love can make a world of difference. In the face of such ugliness, we need to have hearts of love and the willingness to embrace the bruised and broken. Ms. Dirie's deep heart and love for the children of the world could be seen and felt in her smiles for the Little Angels, a children's Korean folk dance troupe, as they performed a congratulatory song.

Though the situation of the world and in Africa can seem bleak, from issues such as extreme hunger and poverty and female genital mutilation, with such bright beacons of hope in Dr. Adesina and Waris Dirie, one can feel that there is hope for the future. The Sunhak Peace Prize advocates for "One Family Under God" and these two incredible individuals are doing a tremendous job in taking care of God's family. WFWP applauds you and thanks you deeply for your work.