

Peace Activities Going Strong on African Continent

Kazuichi Namura, SGI Africa Bureau chief, gave the following speech at the 7th Headquarters Leaders Meeting in Japan, Jan. 7.

From Dec. 25–Jan. 5, I visited three countries in Africa along with SGI Vice General Director Yuichiro Kitano and SGI Advisor to Africa Tadashi Minai. We attended various activities such as a chapter inaugural meeting, a Gohonzon-conferral ceremony and a New Year's gongyo meeting.

We visited Mauritius, Kenya and South Africa, where it was the middle of summer. Members practicing in those countries are cheerfully moving forward to the 21st century alongside SGI President Ikeda.

The highlight of this trip was our first visit to Mauritius. There we conducted a Gohonzon-conferral ceremony on Dec. 28 at which 18 members received the Gohonzon. Georges Rivet, the recently appointed chapter chief, received a Gohonzon after seven years of practice; Dolores Petit, chapter women's division chief, after 14 years of practice; and Lisette Mamode, chapter vice women's division chief, after 15 years of practice.

At the ceremony, the members receiving the Gohonzon gathered with their families and other members who came to celebrate the occasion. All 60 people at the ceremony dressed in formal attire. There was joyful applause and tears of joy.

About one year before the ceremony, President Ikeda received a package from Mauritius in which there were a name list of the 18 people, a photograph of the members and a heartfelt letter telling him how these people had already prepared Buddhist altars and wished to receive the Gohonzon. This request eventually led to the Gohonzon-conferral ceremony we attended.

During our visit to Mauritius, we were originally planning on forming a district there — but it was suggested to form a chapter instead, which we did. At the chapter inaugural meeting, 92 people gathered. You can imagine how much the members were delighted about the formation of a chapter there.

When we arrived at the Mauritius airport, a man named Kumar Pravesh came to see us. He had practiced in India but now works for a radio station in Mauritius as a producer and announcer. He was dispatched to Mauritius by the Indian government two years ago.

As soon as he arrived there, he and his family started looking for SGI members but could not find any.

Just when they thought they were the only SGI members there and had resolved to spread Buddhism there as pioneers, they heard about our visit. So they came to the airport and finally met with the SGI members they had sought for two years.

In Kenya, before a New Year's gongyo meeting, new headquarters leaders were appointed. Out of six new leaders, five have visited Japan and met with President Ikeda.

Since then, they have been steadily promoting activities, making his encouragement their spiritual support. Now all of them are bathed in the magnificent benefit of the practice.

Philemon A. Banja, the headquarters chief, is an operations manager at the main office of a British bank. Kefa Odari, the vice headquarters chief, is an instructor in the Ministry of Education for Youth, and his wife, Masumi, of Soka University's 12th graduating class, is the first Japanese woman to become a lecturer at the University of Nairobi.

Wanja Ngugi, who sang a song at the World Peace Youth Culture Festival held at Koshien Stadium in Japan in 1984, is now a marketing researcher for a major Kenyan hotel chain.

In South Africa last year, a Gohonzon-conferral ceremony was held for the first time in the black township of Soweto.

Mr. Kitano attended a discussion meeting there on Jan. 4, where 13 members came joyfully seeking President Ikeda's guidance.

On the African continent, there are now 53 countries of which 32 have active members. The people's yearning for Buddhism is an unstoppable current of the times.

Through this trip, I have become more confident that the 21st century will be the century of Africa, exactly as President Ikeda has often said.

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