

**AFRICAN CULTURE FESTIVAL KICKOFF HELD IN LOS ANGELES
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On Jan. 21 at the SGI-USA's Los Angeles Friendship Center, the African Events Organizing Committee held a kickoff toward an all-day festival celebrating African arts and culture scheduled for April 8 in Los Angeles.

With approximately 150 members in attendance, the meeting combined faith encouragement with a program exhibiting traditional African music, native dress, dance and poetry.

Beginning with the Bata, an ancient sacred drum played by the Yoruba people in Nigeria, guests and members were immediately drawn into the age-old wonder and skilled execution of drummers Lorenzo De Jesus, Rahsan and Charles Miller. This was followed by the Cora—used by the Jallies, ancient storytellers of the Malinke people of West Africa—which produces a magical harp-like quality as played by Prince Diabate. The performance on this instrument elicited a spontaneous, delightfully synchronized call and response from the audience.

Greetings in the African languages Yoruba, Swahili and Amharic introduced the presentational section of the program, which included “Prologue” by Nigerian poet Odia Ofeimun, performed by Michael Williams. A video of SGI President Ikeda's meetings with African leaders was also shown, a visual experience of the wide-reaching impact of human exchange.

Completing the offerings of represented African culture and art were members who embraced the audience with warmth and energy as they performed an African dance accompanied on drums, along with a sublime collection of beautifully crafted native African dress designed by Stephanie Haynes.

In her closing words, SGI-USA Vice Women's Leader Linda Johnson said, “Challenge that thing that is most difficult for you and create a victory there!”

To learn more about the April festival, please contact Tesfaye Abagaz by phone at (310) 396-1028, or by email at tabagaz@hotmail.com.