

**AFRICAN FESTIVAL HONORS SHARED HUMANITY
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This event is totally incredible.” “Did you see the performances? They were great!” “I’m so glad they decided to have this festival and put so much effort into making sure everything went well.”

These are just a few of the sentiments that one could hear expressed at the Southern California Zone African Arts and Culture Festival, held May 20 at the SGI-USA’s Los Angeles Friendship Center. More than 2,000 people attended the festival with the theme “Honoring and Revealing a Shared Humanity.”

The festival had many events for members and guests of all ages to enjoy. There were performances of traditional dance and music and exhibits of paintings, sculptures and masks. Interactive presentations on African issues addressed the Nile River and its people, why there are over 1,000 African languages and how courage is the ultimate weapon for peace. There was plenty to keep everybody entertained while walking through the LAFC, with photo displays, maps and quotes scattered throughout. In addition, special activities for children were held, like face painting, folk tales, a drum circle and a Masai puppet show.

Several local vendors of African fare were present and served dishes such as *yebeg wot* (beef stew), *yebeg alicha* (lamb stew) and *yemiser wot* (red lentil soup).

The festival’s centerpiece was the premiere of an original play, “Songs of the African Heart,” a musical dramatization of Africa from prehistoric times through the dawn of the new millennium. The play eloquently portrays the roots of humanity that the people of Africa share with human beings everywhere. The show ended with a rousing version of Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

SGI-USA Women’s Leader Matilda Buck, on hand for the festival, said, “The theme of this festival speaks directly to the goal of our SGI movement, bringing people together in an understanding of our fundamental equality and dignity.”

Please see page 12 for more on the festival, including SGI President Ikeda’s message to the event.