



SOBA AMERICA

2020 VIRTUAL ANNUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORT



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SOBA AMERICA 2020 NATIONAL CONVENTION VIRTUAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY REPORT/MINUTES – MAY 23RD, 2020 VIA ZOOM CONFERENCE CALL

Fellow SOBANS,

The pump and pageantry that often characterize the annual get together of SOBANS in North America, under the auspices of SOBA America, has always been the talk and envy of every “diasporan” of African descent. In this regard, as in many more, SOBA America has been the primus inter pares of like associations and continues to be the trailblazer.

The 2020 SOBA America National Convention was built to be a convention like no other. SOBA Dallas, the host chapter, had left no stone unturned in its preparation for this august event slated from May 22nd-24th 2020. Unfortunately, things took a different turn because of a force majeure (the Covid-19 pandemic) which, paradoxically, led to a historic convention no one envisaged. Instead of SOBANS making their customary descent onto the host city, SOBANS found themselves sipping cognac and other premium drinks in the comfort of their homes while at the same time taking part in the Saturday convention deliberations via Zoom conference call.

Scheduled to start at 11am EST, the deliberations kicked off on time with a call to order by President Fote who welcomed SOBANS and thanked all those who had already joined the call. Without further ado, President Fote introduced Rev Fr Desmond Ndikum as the moderator of the deliberations. Rev Ndikum set the ball rolling with a prayer. Prayers were followed by roll call of those who were already on the call.

Chapter Reports

After every attendee had introduced himself, Chapter Presidents were called upon to present a summary of their chapter reports. Full reports had been previously submitted and sent to SOBANS as part of their



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2020 National Convention material prior to the meeting. Highlights of what was presented (not all chapter presidents were on the call at that moment hence would present their report later) included the following:

- SOBA DMV: Expecting a change of leadership with upcoming elections this summer.
- SOBA GA: Putting a structure to assist fellow members experiencing financial distress due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- SOBA AZ: A brief replay of the 2019 mini convention held in Phoenix last November.
- SOBA Houston: Having virtual meetings; doing wellness checks on members, three births and planning the funeral of a fallen brother, SOBAN Mike Samson (burial is scheduled for June 26th in Houston).
- SOBA Montreal: Virtual meetings. Putting together their bylaws. Rev Ndikum thanked the folks in Montreal for their hospitality during his recent trip to their beautiful city.
- SOBA New England: Outing with their SOBANESE to thank them for all their support. SOBANESE of New England have their own WhatsApp group. They had three births and no deaths.
- SOBA Tristate: Presented some updates on the 2020 mini convention scheduled to be held in Detroit. A hotel has already been secured, among other things. More details to follow in due course.

Financial Reports

After the chapter reports had been presented by chapter presidents who were on the call at that juncture, the moderator moved to the next chapter on the agenda which was Financial Reports. The Chief Accounting Officer of SOBA America, Czar Edwin Atem, eloquently presented a detailed financial report of SOBA America which, put succinctly, painted an association on sound financial footing despite the odds. The report was divided into three segments: - SOBA America Quarterly Report, SOBA America Budget, and SOBA America Endowment Fund. Additional details of these reports can be found in the membership portal of the SOBA America website. CAO Atem also indicated that the 2019-2020 annual financial report is also available in the membership portal. Of note, this was the first time in the history of SOBA America that a budget for the upcoming fiscal year was presented.

Fote Administration COVID-19 Financial Relief to SOBANS

CAO Edwin Atem and CFO Rudolf Inoni covered the financial relief portions of the Fote Administration's five part COVID-19 response for SOBA America.

Lend-A-Hand Initiative: Concurrently with the financial reports, Czar Atem talked about the Lend-A-Hand Initiative of the Fote administration, designed to assist SOBANS and SOBANESE in financial difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This initiative, placed under the auspices of the Office of Philanthropy in the General Accounting Department and headed by Czar Atem, is open to all SOBANS and SOBANESE resident in North America regardless of their registration status. SOBANS and SOBANESE experiencing financial



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hardship due to the above-mentioned pandemic are encouraged to apply online for assistance. Funds are disbursed based on a review of each application, and the identities of recipients of such assistance will be kept confidential by SOBA America. At the time of making this presentation, the sum of \$6,500 had already been received from private SOBA donors and another \$10,000.00 had been pledged. CAO Atem explained that the Lend-A-Hand Initiative was designed to also provide professional assistance such as legal assistance, accounting assistance and others to SOBANS and SOBANESE who need these services but are unable to afford them. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the administration decided to focus only on financial assistance for the first 6 months of the program. Other services will be made available after that time.

COVID-19 Vitamin C Relief payment to 2019/2020 registered members: Czar Atem also highlighted the Covid-19 Vitamin C Relief package which had been announced prior to the convention. An estimated \$23,500.00 had been appropriated for this endeavor. Each SOBAN who paid their 2019-2020 registration will receive a relief check in the amount \$50. Due to numerous requests from SOBANS who expressed the wish to donate their relief money to the Lend-A-Hand initiative, all SOBANS were given the option to do so in case they did not need the money. For better accounting and data, the method of payment was decided as checks. This is consistent with the administration's policy of transparency and accountability. Chapter presidents are expected to provide the addresses of their members by May 31st. Since SOBA America checks may not be accepted in Canada, the NLT is working on alternative measures to send the COVID-19 relief funds to SOBANS in Canada.

Question and Answer Segment: Following the presentation of the financial report, a lively conversation in the form of a Q&A followed. A convention attendee wondered aloud (in echoing the sentiments of some SOBANS) why the Relief package is coined "Vitamin C." "Is it because President Fote is a medical doctor?" he asked. In response, President said that it was coined that way not because of his profession as a medical doctor but because Vitamin C is good for our immune system. However, he added, SOBANS are not bound to use the relief money on vitamin C. They are free to use the money on whatever they choose to. Many SOBANS suggested that the money be disbursed to all registered SOBANS, encourage them to accept the money and, for those who want to donate it, to do so subsequently. President Fote clarified that the goal of the Vitamin C relief to provide relief to every registered member for 2019/2020 and that the option for SOBANS to indicate if they wanted to donate their relief money was given only because many SOBANS had reached out to NLT members and asked to donate their relief money. The administration, therefore felt it would be reasonable to provide that option to SOBANS. Some raised the idea that the amount was too heavy and wondered if it is okay to give the executive committee the power to make such an impactful decision. President Fote clarified that the board has the authority to make such a decision and it was done and it was done responsibly.

A suggestion was made to the effect that the relief funds could be disbursed to chapter presidents via other means such as Cashapp. President Fote again explained that funds will only be disbursed in the form



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of checks mailed directly to SOBANS (with the exception of SOBANS in Canada), for reasons already mentioned above.

As to why a deadline of May 31st was set for chapter Presidents to submit their chapter membership information, it was emphasized that this was necessary to speed up the disbursement of this one time amount that had already been authorized, mindful of the fact that not all chapters might have this information on time. Chapter Presidents had also been notified of this request prior to the convention.

HRH Fondungallah asked where the funds of the endowment are currently located. He suggested that such funds be put in some money-making account. President Fote explained that the endowment funds are currently in our bank account but that the goal is to place the funds in an account such as Chief Fondungallah suggested. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon and the transfer of our alma mater out of Sasse, President Fote added, has greatly affected the smooth operation of the endowment program, especially in the sense that fundraising for it was suspended for the time being. The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped matters. Operations will resume once things calm down. President Fote announced that the administration intends to resume the SOBA America Day which includes the scholarship program for students in Sasse once things return to normal in Cameroon and Sasse students return on campus. He noted that Bishop Bibi has affirmed his commitment to see students return to SJC Sasse campus in the 2020/2021 academic year.

By-laws Review and Adoption Process

Secretary General Divine Tange informed SOBANS that plans to debate on the by-laws and have a final vote at the 2020 National convention had to be changed when the convention was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since by-laws changes require a general assembly vote, the process has been moved. He indicated that debating on the proposals from SOBANS that were put together and submitted by the By-Laws review Task team will take place in the months leading to the 2021 National Convention. That will provide SOBANS with enough time to consider the proposals, evaluate them and form opinions prior to the final voting on amendments at the 2021 National Convention in Dallas, TX.

Membership Engagement

President Fote opened the floor for suggestions on how to handle the issue of some members registering either only with their local chapter or only with the national chapter. He expressed the desire to see all members register both locally and nationally. He opened the floor for a conversation on how to achieve that goal. Several suggestions were made by SOBANS some of which were: sync national and local



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registrations so that SOBANS make a one-time payment for both; SOBA national payment should be tied to local chapter membership; have class ambassadors to relay information to their various class members because many SOBANS don't even understand how SOBA America operates even after paying their membership dues.

A SOBAN lamented the fact that many SOBANS just pay their national dues and sit back without ever participating at chapter deliberations nor do they ever participate in fund drives, and yet expect to benefit from such drives when they are bereaved. He continued by saying that bereavement contributions are consistently done for the most part by the same SOBANS.

A suggestion was made to eliminate SOBA MAL (Members At Large) and have SOBANS who do not have a chapter where they reside to choose to join a chapter of their choice. It was also suggested that the NLT should do a better job in encouraging members to pay both their local and national dues through robo-calls and other means. Class groups should also be engaged to in this endeavor.

President Fote summarized the main points in the discussion and indicated that his administration will work with SOBANS to consider the suggestions, seek more feedback and propose a solution to the issue.

State of SOBA America Address

Two hours and 50 minutes into the meeting, President Fote gave his state of the SOBA America address. In broad strokes, he presented three aspects of his administration:

Inclusion and Innovation: President Fote noted that this is the most-inclusive administration in the history of SOBA America with many SOBANS involved in the daily management of SOBA America through service in the different departments created at the beginning of his administration , and several task teams set up to work on key administration initiatives. He highlight his administration's outreach efforts to as many SOBANS as possible which has helped boost membership He also announced his administration's desire to grow SOBA America by creating chapters where feasible. He shared the fact that his administration is reaching out to SOBANS in Alberta (Calgary and Edmonton), Canada and in New York/New jersey area to begin the groundwork for creating chapters there. President Fote also touted some key innovative initiatives of his administration such as the launching of SOBA America TV Network, SOBA America Business directory (white pages), and the Lend-A-Hand Initiative.

Accountability: President Fote noted that his administration had taken significant steps to ensure transparency and accountability in SOBA America. He highlighted measures such as requiring more accountability from chapter presidents as a liaison between their chapters and SOBA America, improved



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communication with monthly messages from the President and periodic virtual town hall meetings via zoom, publishing our financial reports on time and doing so more transparently.

Leadership: The President noted that SOBA America is showing global leadership and working more collaboratively with the new apostolic administrator of the Buea Diocese and proprietor of Sasse – Bishop Michael Bibi - for the good of our alma mater. He stated that finishing the setup of the office of alumni association in the campus of SJC Sasse would greatly increase our ability to continue to lead with a presence on the ground.

President Fote thanked SOBANS for their participation thus far in the affairs of SOBA America and the continued support that his administration is receiving thus far. He reminded SOBANS that while his administration had made significant progress in its goal to create an all-inclusive highly functional organization with value to all its membership, we still have work ahead of us in this transformational journey. He urged SOBANS to stay engaged because in his words, *“team work makes the dream work.”* The President concluded by stating that state of SOBA America is STRONG.

Question and Answer Session:

It was suggested that the current administration own the Band Project and not push responsibility of this to the previous administration. Another SOBAN lamented the fact that there are so far no receipts sent to donors to the Band Project and urged members of the said committee to be more responsive to donors. Diligent work is being done to make sure that an accurate report on this is ultimately produced.

Another SOBAN suggested virtual debates be held for aspirants to National Leadership Team positions especially regarding the position of the National President.

A SOBAN suggested that a committee be set up to vet projects to be carried out in Sasse. He submitted that the current idea to build a fence around some areas in Sasse will alter the beauty of this historic campus. Another suggested that we need to join forces to help our alma mater. Furthermore, a suggestion was made that a heritage committee be set up to make Sasse a historic site and to also change some amenities on the campus such as eliminating pit toilets and acquire modern beds, among others.

Another suggestion was that we should start looking at making investments to generate funds to be used to assist Sasse College and not call upon SOBANS all the time to raise funds for Sasse College.

President Fote promised to continue to build a good relationship with the Bishop’s House. A committee will be set up to put together an agenda and invite the Bishop to the table for further discussions. With



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such an environment, great achievements will be made. He also encouraged SOBANS to continue to keep providing their suggestions. All suggestions are welcome.

As to when the students of Sasse are going back to the campus, President Fote informed the general assembly that from his conversations with Bishop Bibi, all plans are being put in place to have the students return to the campus at the start of the next academic year (September 2020).

2020 Mini-convention and 2021 National Convention updates

A brief update of planning for the 2020 mini-convention was given by Vice-President Felix Ngassa. He informed SOBANS that Detroit, MI is set to host SOBANS from November 13th to 15th, 2020 for the mini-convention. He promised a mini-convention like no other.

The 2021 National Convention Vice-Chair, SOBAN Edwin~Daniel Ndoko informed SOBANS that Dallas will be ready to welcome SOBANS for the 2021 National Convention come memorial day weekend 2021. SOBANS were encouraged to start making plans for the 2021 National convention in Dallas. SOBANS were promised that it will be a total blast.

CLOSING

Three hours and twenty six minutes into the deliberations, President Fote made a summation with his closing remarks. He thanked SOBANS for attending. It should be mentioned that a total of 76 members were on the call at the maximum count. He encouraged SOBANS to keep the conversation going because teamwork makes the dream work. He wished all SOBANS blessings and safety.

At 3:30pm, Rev Desmond Ndikum closed the deliberations with prayers.

The meeting was then adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted by

Divine Tange

Secretary General – SOBA America