



**SOBA AMERICA**

## **2021 SOBA AMERICA VIRTUAL CONVENTION REPORT**

Dear Sobans,

The long awaited Soba America National Convention took place on May 29<sup>th</sup> 2021. The convention was slated for Dallas in the Lone Star state of Texas. However, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, another virtual convention for the second year in a row became inevitable. This did not deter the National Leadership Team, under the stewardship of the indefatigable President of Soba America (POSA), Dr Bertrand Fote, from executing one of the most successful national conventions in the history of Soba America. After spending hundreds of hours planning, strategizing and fine-tuning convention plans with members of the NLT and NEC, the Soba America TV network team, the team from Transformunity hosting the convention, the convention moderator Mr Arrey Obenson, the various chapter presidents and others, all was set for a memorable event. The theme of the convention was “Tenacity in the face of Covid-19.”

The ball was set rolling when convention attendees began receiving their convention packages in the mail to wet their appetite. The package consisted of the much talked-about convention souvenir which was a phone power bank with wireless capability made exclusively for Soba America; the convention magazine; the Soba America Business Directory; the convention manual including the convention program; as well as the decal Soba America calendar. This raised the level of excitement as the convention neared. Many Sobans who failed to register before the convention deadline of May 10 regretted not doing so and promised to register on time for next year’s convention.

For the purpose of keeping an official record of Soba America business, we will dwell on the major issues of the convention, and then shed some general light on the other highlights.

### **BUSINESS MEETING/DELIBERATIONS/DEBATES:**

**A. BYLAWS:** Even though the debate on this issue had already taken place extensively on our Telegram Business group, it was important that sometime be allocated (20 minutes) to discuss this issue again. A brief presentation on the bylaws was presented by Presidnet Fote on behalf of the Secretary General Divine Tange who was having issues with his microphone. President Fote gave a brief background on how the bylaws committee came into being. The chairman of the bylaws committee, Father Desmond Ndikum, was then given the microphone to make his presentation. Rev Ndikum reminded Sobans that the bylaws committee was composed of the following Sobans: President Ferdinand Akoh of the 84 class, Barrow Tabe, Dr Aloys Ibeagha, Professor Felix Ngassa, President Emeritus Larry Ekaney, Barrister Nzo Mungo, Masonjo Lyonga, and Philbert MacEtchu. The committee met almost every week for 9 months, working proposals from Sobans. In order to avoid bias, names of people who submitted proposals were blacked out. To tackle redundancy, identical proposals were merged into a single proposal. Article 1 (one) wasn't touched because it basically talks about Soba America's incorporation.

**Q&A:**

1. Proposal for board to give a 48-hour notice before a meeting about schedule and agenda, and the minutes released within 48 hours after the meeting. Rev Ndikum lamented why this issue didn't go through the process despite the initial outcry for more openness by some members.
2. Next speaker was President Emeritus Larry Ekaney who commented on article 6(a) regarding milestones. He asked for some clarification on this issue. He also inquired about special circumstances whereby a spouse passes away. President Fote responded that the benefits are for the stipulated years and, as for marriages, a second or third marriage will still count for benefits.
3. Nzo Mungo brought up the issue that in speaking with Sobans in private, many raised some concerns. He urged them to bring forth their concerns in an open forum.
4. President Edmund Mbu of Soba MAL spoke about Article 2A(7) regarding public scandal and asked that it be refined so that it is not abused or misused. He urged for some legal clarity to this provision. President Fote chimed in to say that the interpretation of that article will rest on the BOD.
5. Dr Aloys Ibeagha observed the wonderful job of the bylaws committee. He seconded the proposal from President Mbu to define what public scandal to avoid confusion.
6. Brilliant Efon asked about Article 2A.3 regarding the new membership fees.
7. Soban Etta Egbe asked about benefits for those who are between 25 and 50 years of marriage. No benefits for such members.

8. Oscar Embola sought clarification article 4A.3 regarding highest moral character. Chairman Ndikum responded that it is self-evident.
9. Fidelis Nkeze thanked the organizers for the wonderful convention. He asked for one or two examples of public scandal using words such as “included but not limited to” etc. Chairman Ndikum referred Soban Fidelis to further readings of the bylaws for clarification.
10. Gerald Tchatchoa asked for more clarification on high moral character.
11. Ferdinand Akoh: Asked that we do not vote on these issues until they are broadly defined. President Fote submitted that voting will not be postponed because Sobans had ample time to debate these issues. If need be, they will be considered down the road.

#### **B. ELECTIONS:**

Given the fact that members of the NLT ran unopposed, they were all expected to retain their positions at the end of the elections, which is what ultimately happened.

#### **C. 2024 SOBA AMERICA CONVENTION VENUE.**

Hosting of the 2024 Soba America convention was being contested by both Soba Arizona and Soba Tri-State. A passionate presentation was made by President Sona Bokossah of Soba Arizona on behalf of his chapter. There was no presentation from Soba Tri-State. Soba Arizona ultimately won the vote and will host the 2024 Soba America convention.

#### **D. MOTION ON EXTENDING THE TERM OF THE CURRENT ADMINISTRATION**

This motion was about granting a one-time exception of an additional term to the current administration as a result of the force majeure of the covid-19 pandemic. President Ntang who was the author of this motion wasn't initially available to make a presentation so it was open to discussion.

Soban Becke: Inasmuch he wanted to commend on the good job of this administration, he didn't support the idea that the Fote administration should be giving an extended mandate.

Soban Gerald Tchatchoa asked for clarity of what the motion is. Is it a motion to give the current administration the ability to seek a third term or to extend their current mandate to include an additional two years?

President Ntang Elad then made a presentation of his motion. He stated that he wasn't conversant of the fact that there were no term limits in our bylaws. He continued to state that

the administration has done a lot and felt that it needs time to pursue their agenda. So he called for his proposal to be voted on as presented. There was a vigorous conversation regarding term limits. Some Sobans were surprised that our current bylaws don't have term limits. President Fote clarified that the issue of term limits had been discussed a while ago but never made it to our bylaws. Reason why President Fote submitted the proposal of term limits to the bylaws committee. When President Ntang was asked to withdraw the motion or leave it, he opted to not withdraw the motion. Soban Nzo Mungo chimed in to say that the term of the current administration be extended. HRH Michael Fondungallah insisted that the motion is moot at this time because there are no term limits. He requested that the motion be withdrawn to save time. Mola Steve supported the motion and asked that the administration be given additional time as proposed by President Ntang Elad. He added that it isn't the administration asking for an additional term but Sobans like himself who support the motion. Soban Brilliant Efon supported the opinion earlier submitted by HRH Michael Fondungallah. He also asked for clarification on when this term limit should start. President Akoh added that the pandemic didn't impact the awesome performance of this administration. He asked that if this administration wants a third term, they can run for it. The final word on this issue was given to President Ntang who said that elections ARE about majority rule hence if this motion passes, then there will be no need for another election. Secondly, he said that in person conventions are where hearts and minds are won so they are different from virtual conventions.

#### **E. VIOLATION OF ARTICLE 4.1(8) BY SOBAN NKA FOMENKY.**

President Bertrand Fote made a brief statement on the motion. He gave a brief history on how Soba America got to Telegram as an option for Soba America when Whatsapp couldn't handle more than 260 members. The Soba America Telegram groups were set up by Soban Nka Fomenky (who was the organization's Treasurer at the time) at the direction of then President Itoe, for the benefit of Soba America. After summarizing the motion, President Fote informed Sobans that Soba America will transition from Telegram to another platform pretty soon. The discussion on this matter was very active and robust as some Sobans spoke in favor of the motion while a few spoke in opposition to it.

Dr Kevin Njabo: Called a point of order. He said that Soba America should first of all establish that the Telegram groups belong to Soba.

Soban Stanley Ati: If Soba America is transitioning to a different forum, why still sanction Soban Nka Fomenky. He did not in any way condone the action of Soban Fomenky.

Soban Aloysius: If Soban moves to another platform, what happens to the name on the Telegram forum?

Soban Amadeus: He said that he had suggested to President Itoe at the time when Whatsapp reached full capacity to use one of his NLT members to set up Telegram. He supported the sanction on Soban Fomenky.

Peter Lyonga: Supports sanctions on Fomenky but questioned why it took so long for the administration to act on this issued. We need to move on with the sanctions on Soban Fomenky.

Senior Soban Etta Egbe: Had concerns about the administration bringing up this matter for deliberation as a convention motion. The administration should have sanctioned him a long time ago if the Telegram groups belong to Soba America.

Arthur Becke: Asked that it should be on the record that he preferred to abstain on his vote on this and wants the third option (abstention) to be added to the vote.

HRH Fondungallah: The fact that Nka created the forum does not negate the fact that the groups do belong to Soba America. Sanctions are merited.

It was suggested that the administration should ask Fomenky to remove the name Soba America from the Telegram groups.

Mbei Enoch: We should be mindful of how we approach this matter because leaving a grey area could lead to bigger issues down the road.

Fidelis Nkeze: The lowest time for him on this convention. A new forum should be created and lessons learnt.

Brilliant Efon: President Fote should have taken action on this a long time ago. Setting a new forum is good but it should go hand in hand with sanctions. We can't keep running.

President Fote clarified why it took so long for action to be taken. He tried mediation, keeping in mind that taking sanction on a Soban is a delicate matter. Hence he wanted all options to be exhausted. The administration didn't want to bring long before the General Assembly had the time to deliberate on it.

Soban Ferdinand Akoh: We shouldn't run from it. He believed that the groups belong to Soba America. He asked for two weeks to get the Telegram groups back to Soba America.

Mola Steve Ndely: This is the second consecutive convention whereby the association is held hostage by the same individual. This has to stop.

Peter Lyonga: Wants some clarification. Did this individual create Telegram. He didn't understand why this issue became so important.

Epizitone Anabi: Advised that we put down clear laws addressing this issue. We should try some diplomacy as suggested by President Akoh.

Aloysius Amin: Inasmuch as he supported giving additional time as suggested by President Akoh, he wanted us to stay in Telegram but sanction Soban Nka Fomenky because we can't keep running.

Rev Ndikum: Let's temper justice with mercy for the good of all by just moving to another forum and let the sanctions go.

Alexis Ndille: Nobody is bigger than Soba America hence we shouldn't tolerate such behavior. We should set precedence in case such a thing happens in the future.

Ambrose Ewane: Action should be taken on this issue. Propose that

## **OTHER HIGHLIGHTS**

As promised by POSA Fote, the convention started on time and the rest of the day went hitch free. Highlights of the convention included the following;

1. The school anthem was sung as a collation of entries from the various chapters, skillfully synchronized to deliver a beautiful rendition.
2. A grand mass with the chief celebrant being Reverend Father Valentine Suum of the Sasse 1984 class OF who blessed the august occasion and called on Sobans to stay united.
3. Sobans were treated to a colorful opening ceremony whereby chapters sent in their roll call videos which were then played to the entire audience. Soba California, Dallas, Carolinas and Georgia stole their day with their colorful presentations. Unfortunately, a few chapters didn't send in their entries.
4. An emotional and compelling address to Soba America by his Eminence Wilton Cardinal Gregory (Archbishop of Washington DC), the first and only African-American Cardinal. Cardinal Gregory acknowledged that we have persevered the devastating effects of Covid-19 through prayers and hope for change. He also acknowledged how Sobans have cared for one another and also helped many others in need during this period. He called on Sobans to learn from their patron saint (Saint Joseph) who is a model of love, care and leadership. He added that like Saint Joseph, our faith should give us the strength to say yes to a promise that we do not fully understand as we

put our complete trust in the Lord. He prayed for the intercession of St Joseph to help us endure the difficulties of the moment of global pandemic and also prayed for the end of conflict, and for peace, in Cameroon.

5. Reports: Various reports and updates were presented on the following: Financial Reports, Lend-a-Hand Initiative Report; SAGI report, the Pa Ngando Honor Project. Sobans were asked to refer to the convention manual for chapter reports.
6. There was a brief debate on the Soba America bylaws. Unlike past conventions, discussions on this matter were kept brief because most of the debate had already taken place on our Soba America platform. Throughout the day, voting was open to all convention attendees for the following matters: members of the National Leadership Team, Soba America Bylaws and Convention Motions. Voting was open until 5pm EST.
7. KEYNOTE ADDRESS: The convention keynote speaker was Tina Sinkler who spoke on “Tenacity and Determination, How To Stay Connected and Purposeful.” Tina Sinkler “is currently the Director of Athletics at The Hockaday School in Dallas. Previously, she was the head women's basketball coach at the University of North Texas in Denton, Texas, where she and her teams achieved numerous milestones, including four Conference Championships, back to back appearances in the WNIT, and Big West Conference Coach of the Year for the 1998-1999 season. She departed as the winningest coach in UNT women's basketball history posting 241 wins in nineteen seasons.”
8. For the intellectual enrichment segment, Sobans listened to a very engaging presentation from Dr Nagella Nwana Nukuna and Dr Chris Bime.
9. The evening was punctuated by a Red-Tie gala with DJ skipper on the mix and Soban Bendrix Tabu as the MC. During the evening gala, the Spotlight award was presented to Soba America President Frederick Mafany Itoe; new members of the President's Club received their pins from their spouses; service awards were presented to deserving recipients. Dr Mrs Takusi and her husband Soban Emmanuel Takusi wowed Sobans with a Hollywood-styled presentation of the awards.
10. President Fote gave a state of The Soba America Union address.

The 2021 Virtual National Convention ended around 11:00pm at the conclusion of the virtual gala.

Respectfully Submitted by  
Divine Tange  
Secretary General – SOBA America