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## Sharon Koh in Africa



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As we celebrated Black History Month, our Area (Africa) hosted International Ministries (IM) Executive Director and CEO, the Rev. Sharon Koh. From February 5th through 11th, the All Africa Baptist Fellowship (AABF) convened its General Council and Executive Committee meetings in Blantyre, Malawi. It is worth noting that AABF is one of IM's trusted partners in

Africa. The AABF General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Duro Ayanrinola, extended an invitation to IM's Executive Director to attend this event. I was personally very grateful to have Rev. Koh in Africa. In 2016, right after she joined IM, she visited all IM global servants, including meeting with missionaries serving in Africa in Johannesburg, South Africa, in August of that year. In Africa, both IM missionaries and IM partners carry out our ministry. So it was important for Rev. Koh to meet with IM's partners now, in 2018. This visit has sent a powerful message that we, at IM, are serious when we say that we value the contribution of our partners in Africa to the mission of Jesus Christ. We cannot continue to believe that mission is something from the West, from rich nations to poor ones. Each one is important in the Kingdom of God. Jesus' blood was shed for each one regardless of class, gender, race. That is what John saw in Revelations 7:9 "After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands". As stressed in IM's Responding To the Call strategic plan, mission is "from everywhere to everyone".

In Malawi, Rev. Koh was not the only representative from IM! I, Eleazar Zihembere, Area Director for Africa, and Marilyn Raatz, IM's Regional Missionary, accompanied her. They met partners both formally and informally, to discuss the best way of moving forward together in mission. At Blantyre, we met with our partners from South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Cameroon, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Other potential partners met with us to discuss how we could work together, including delegates from Malawi, Tanzania, and Central African Republic.

In her address, Rev. Koh spoke about the suffering Church! In Africa, the Church continues to depend on her Lord, as many other avenues seem deceptive. In that gathering, for example, we could not meet our friends from Ethiopia due to a state of emergency that made traveling problematic for the delegates. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where we have many of our missionaries serving in Africa, a political crisis kept delegates from DRC from coming to Blantyre. Besides political issues, traveling in Africa requires both commitment and sacrifice. For example, I paid \$880 to travel from Philadelphia to Johannesburg and back, but our delegate from Sierra Leone paid \$1,905 to arrive at Blantyre! People we met were people who sacrificed.

I must confess that IM's participation was also expensive. However, the impact of Rev. Koh's presence in Africa was by far greater than the cost. In his comments, AABF general secretary Rev. Duro noted: "Her presence was a convincing evidence that International Ministries is committed to partnering with Baptist conventions and unions in Africa to advance God's kingdom in the continent. Because of her presence, many IM partners from all four sub regions of AABF attended. In addition, during her sermon, she said some things that resonated with the African understanding of Jesus' ministry. She said, 'Africans identify with the suffering Christ and serving Christ'. Furthermore, she said, 'Africans are deeply devoted to worshipping God' of which she actively participated; dancing and singing some of our songs. She also inspired us with her testimony and her simplicity."

Rev. Joseph Fornah, from Sierra Leone, sharing about Rev. Koh, commented: "My meeting with Sharon Koh in Malawi as President of the Baptist Convention of Sierra Leone is a big blessing. I am challenged by her humility and love for the Church in Africa". Many other leaders of our partner conventions/unions, and those not yet partners, have all expressed their joy and excitement in meeting her.

After Rev. Koh returned to the United States, many potential partners came to see me, as she had predicted! We discussed steps to become partners with IM. IM's existing partnerships developed mainly from a request for possible global servants to serve with them. The words of Jesus have never been as relevant as now: "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest' (Matthew 9: 37-38)". We received requests for evangelism and church planting strategists, Seminary professors, social ministries especially with women's ministries, health ministries (nurses and doctors), and many more!

Please pray for IM domestic staff, pray for IM missionaries serving around the globe, and pray for IM national partners.

Rev. Dr. Eleazar Ziherambere  
Area Director for Africa



Rev. Koh and Dr. Ziherambere with Pelagie Gichanga of Kenya



IM global servant Marilyn Ratz speaks to African leaders in Malawi