

Benin: the inheritance from the democrat Albert

- translated by Sara Grund Sørensen from <https://globalnyt.dk/content/benin-arven-fra-demokraten-albert>

BLOG: If you care for the democracy and believe that a vigorous civilian society is a premise for democracy, then it is worth noticing the recently deceased Albert Tévoédjré.

“Angélique Kidjo has through the entire of her career been the finest lawyer of the state of Benin”, writes Torben Holleufer on the 29th of July.

I agree that Kidjo is a skilled singer; however, there are more to life than music. How much has Holleufer studied other aspects of life in the country?

Albert Tévoédjré (1929-2019) played a leading role, when Benin, thirty years ago, changed the government from a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship to a parliamentary democracy. Together with archbishop Isidore de Souza - https://www.emmaus-international.org/images/site/menu/qui-sommes-nous/emmaus-monde/europe/danemark/GTU/docs_EN/My_African_Idol.pdf - he pressured president Mathieu Kérékou to call for a national conference. This conference came to happen in 1990 with de Souza as conductor, leading to a transitional government, which prepared free parliamentary- and presidential elections.

Alongside this – and due to the consideration that a working democracy needs an interaction with thriving and inspiring association-activities – Tévoédjré and de Souza founded the two first Beninese member organizations of Emmaus International. The current three organizations in the country work, among other things, with: the processing of household rubbish into compost for an ecological garden nursery; different informational initiatives; the abolishment of child labour and trade of human beings; a big water supply- and sanitary project in and around the big lagoon of the Nokoué lake.

These activities have gained so much respect within and without the country that the chairman of Emmaus Pahou, situated between the capital Cotonou and Ouidah, Patrick Atohoun, in 2016 was elected as chairman of Emmaus International.

The meeting avoided participants from the North

In the beginning of 2019, a meeting between the associations around the Nokoué lake took place, in order to coordinate the dialogue with the authorities and to avoid double burden of work. Read the article “A closer look ... 1st Forum of the Organisations of lake Nokoué”, to be found at https://www.emmaus-international.org/images/site/menu-secondaire/publications/tam-tam/PDF/TAMTAM_74_FR_WEB.pdf

The course of the meeting gives the impressions that the associations to a still smaller degree see each other as competitors in relevance to favours from the white world. There were no attendees from the northern countries.

Tévoédjré was a trained economist from the universities in Toulouse, Fribourg, and Geneva, and he taught at the universities of Harvard, Sorbonne and Northwestern in Chicago. Additionally, he spent several years working in the labour organisation ILO of the UN. In 1999 and 2000, he was working together with the UN's, at that time, secretary general, Kofi Annan, in order to establish a great diplomatic millennium seminar, and in the years from 2003 to 2005, they united on diplomatic missions in order to establish peace on the Ivory Coast. In 2010, Tévoédjré powered a seminar with hundreds of prominent participants in the occasion of the 50 years anniversary for independence of multiple African countries.

He was minister of Information in Benin from 1960 to 1963; minister for Planning in 1996 to 1999; member of parliament from 1991 to 1996 and ended his career as one of Benin's first parliamentary commissioner in 2006 to 2013.

The ombudsman-institute is a Danish invention and was established while Benin was a Danish program co-operation country, as the journalist Lars Zbinden Hansen has earlier mentioned in the site Globalnyt. <https://globalnyt.dk/content/benin-og-danidas-exit-ii-danmark-har-vaeret-som-ilt-os>

Tévoédjré gave one of his last interviews with Emmaus International in 2017 <https://www.emmaus-international.org/en/news/58-heritage/1716-«-mes-idées-ont-été-galvanisées-par-ma-rencontre-avec-l'abbé-pierre-».html>

According to the opening quote from Torben Holleufer, it is difficult to compare music to other manifestations of life, and it is at least equally difficult to compare working at a university to working in ministries and parliament, on UN missions and as parliamentary commissioner. However, it is evident that the work of Tévoédjré on the strengthening of the civilian society is of great importance and should be imitated. The entire world needs politicians who appreciate and encourage the civil society.