

Inaugural African Humanities Association Conference

The Inaugural Humanities Association (AHA) Conference happened at the University of Cape Town (South Africa) between 26th and 29th November 2023. The theme was *Engaging Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts Scholarship in Africa*. The AHA is an offshoot of the African Humanities Program (AHP) that has for the last 15 years funded cutting-age humanities researches in five African countries, and has benefitted over 500 postdoc, early careers and dissertation completion scholars, drawn from five countries: Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. The generous funding came from Carnegie and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). After these many years, the time has come for ACLS to wean the AHP into the AHA, to become more independent and self-governing, although ACLS retains its partnership with the young association that has just been birthed.

Needless to say, the AHA builds on the foundational values, human and intellectual resources of the AHP garnered over the years. As stated at the last assembly of the AHP in Abuja in 2020 when AHA was established, its main objective is the commitment to promoting research and publications in the Humanities, Social Sciences and Arts in Africa. It aims to stimulate curiosities and critical thinking through a process of sustained mentorship in order to create the critical mass needed for the transformation of society. The benefits of belonging to such a continental body of scholars is huge for both individuals and institutions like Makerere University. See AHA Website for the comprehensive objectives and benefits for members: [Home | African Humanities Association](#)

At the conference, Uganda (and Makerere in particular) was well represented by a delegation of six (6) academics, including: Prof. Dominic Dipio who is one of the AHA Executive Committee members, Prof. Peter Baguma, Assoc. Prof. Saudah Namyalo, Assoc. Prof. Okaka Opio Dokotum, Assoc. Prof. Elizabeth Kyazike, Assoc. Prof. William Kyeyune, Dr William Tayeebwa, Dr Eve Nabulya, Dr Jimmy Spire Ssentongo and Dr Laury Lawrence Ocen. Other participants outside the continent included the ACLS President, Joy Connolly and her delegation, plus representatives of the African Diaspora from the USA. Over 195 papers were presented at the Conference by academics from different parts of Africa. Indeed, the majority of the participants were not former AHP fellows, but fresh AHA arrivals! New books published under the African Humanities Association Series were also launched – one of them titled, *Beyond Monuments: The politics and poetics of memory in post-war northern Uganda*, by Dr Laury L. Ocen. Further news was broken by the AHA Executive that, starting in 2024, the publications will also be in partnership with Taylor and Francis. This is a great opportunity for cutting edge Humanities and Social Sciences researches to see publication and global circulation.

Three fascinating keynotes opened each day of the conference. The first day was sparkled by a one-hour plus paper performance from the renowned South African-global poet-philosopher, Malika Ndlovu, titled, “Re-turning to Ourselves, Our Wealth: Poetic reflections”. The second day’s keynote, titled, “The Commitment of the Pan-African Intellectual”, that spoke to the pan-African scope of the association, was delivered by Issa Shivji, a household name in humanistic scholarship. Finally, the third day was crowned by Ari Sitas’ riveting presentation titled, “Another world was, is, will be possible...: Africa’s challenges and the Humanities Project”, that put the participants on the edge. In all the three intense days of deliberations, participants in the parallel sessions kept returning to these three inspired keynotes, whose reverberating messages converged in one

sentence that can be summarised thus: **Africa is not a land of lack, but of abundance: All that is left is for its children to believe in themselves and take the right steps!** The energy, passion, and depth of ideas at the Conference were reassuring that the Humanities are only getting stronger despite the rising tides that diminish it; for we cannot qualitatively exist without foregrounding these disciplines that are the DNA of what it means to be human. Let us be part of this Association and bring our voices together for a more vibrant and engaged humanities scholarship and practice.

Although the over 500 AHP Fellows remain the base of the AHA, the boundaries of AHA have now been opened to the entire continent with all its diverse phonic traditions: Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arab-phone. In this regard, membership to the association is deliberately sought. The current membership fee, that is paid every two years in correspondence with the AHA conferences, is USD 30 only. This should ordinarily be paid online, although the online payment modal is still being perfected and made easier to use. Should an intending member want to pay in cash, s/he can do so through Prof. Dominic Dipio, who is the AHA Treasurer on the Executive.