The Society for AIDS In Africa under the auspices of the SAA Executive Board organized a dinner cocktail event on 11th May 2024 at the Golden Tulip Hotel. Among the invited guests, dignitaries, and members of the diplomatic corps was the Guest of Honor, the Minister of Health of the Republic of Benin, Hon. Prof. Benjamin Hounkpatin, Madam Valentine Kiki Medegan, representing the Head of State for the elimination of HIV, Tuberculosis, Malaria, Hepatitis, STIs, and emerging infections in Benin amongst others.
Mr. Néhémi Kakpo, on behalf of the Chairman of the Benin Network of Associations of People Living with HIV/AIDS gave his welcome remarks. He stated that this event was very significant in bringing together all stakeholders involved in the fight against HIV in Benin and Africa at large. This occasion allows me to address the Benin government and our partners. Since the first AIDS case in 1985, Benin had made continuous efforts against HIV. However, stigma and discrimination against vulnerable populations remain significant barriers, even in health facilities. He urged the Minister of Health to intensify efforts to combat these issues, essential for achieving the UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets.

In 2001, the African Union committed to allocating 15% of national budgets to health, a goal reaffirmed in 2023. To date, Benin has not met this target. He sort the Minister’s support to fulfill this commitment, crucial for managing HIV effectively.

He also thanked the SAA Executive Board for their ongoing efforts and urged continued support to achieve an AIDS-free Africa by 2030. In conclusion he extended his gratitude to everyone for their contributions to the fight against HIV in Benin and worldwide, particularly for Key and vulnerable populations.
Hon. Dr. David Pagwesese Parirenyatwa, SAA President proceeded to give his welcome remarks. He extended our heartfelt gratitude to Hon. Prof. Benjamin Hounkpatin, Minister of Health of the Benin Republic. Despite his demanding schedule, for honoring his invitation to this cocktail event, marking the conclusion of significant 32nd session of the SAA Executive Board meeting in Benin on 11th May 2024 at the Golden Tulip Hotel. He acknowledged his presence at the event further stressed on the importance of our collective effort and his unwavering commitment to public health in Africa, particularly Benin.

Hon. Dr. Parirenyatwa acknowledged and commended the efforts of the government under the leadership of His Excellency President Patrice Athanase Guillaume Talon. The strides Benin has made towards achieving the 95-95-95 targets in the fight against HIV was impressive. This progress was a testament to the dedication and hard work of President Talon’s leadership. He encouraged the government to continue this momentum and strive to reach the ultimate goal of zero new infections, zero discrimination, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

Furthermore, he stated that achieving the end of HIV requires robust domestic financing. It is possible if we all, across Africa, collaborate and worked hand-in-hand with local and international philanthropists. He reiterated the urgent need for Africa to develop and implement effective and innovative mechanisms to fund initiatives sustainably. Only through collective effort can we secure a future free of HIV.

In his concluding remarks, he was pleased to note that the Benin Parliament has thus far refrained from passing any discriminatory laws that could hinder progress in the fight against HIV. This non-discriminatory approach was crucial for the effectiveness of the fight against HIV. He urged parliamentarians to continue their advocacy and work with their counterparts to ensure that no population is left behind in this battle.
Hon. Dr. David Parirenyatwa extended his deepest gratitude to the Government of Benin for hosting the SAA Executive Board and providing a conducive environment for productive discussions and fruitful outcomes.

The Honorable Minister of Health and Guest of Honour, Hon. Prof. Benjamin Hounkpatin, took the stage to deliver his welcome address. He mentioned that he was honored to speak at this event to mark the conclusion of the 32nd session of the Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA) in Cotonou, Benin. This event highlighted the crucial roles of political, scientific, and community leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa. Secondly, he acknowledged that despite significant progress made, we are still striving for an AIDS-free Africa.

He extended his sincere thanks to the Government of Benin for its commitment to initiatives combating AIDS, STIs, and Non-Communicable Diseases. On behalf of His Excellency President Patrice Talon, he also acknowledged the leadership of ICASA and SAA, particularly Hon. Dr. David Pagwesese Parirenyatwa, members of the SAA Executive Board and the participants from across Africa. This 32nd Board meeting was a milestone for Benin, reflecting its dedication to the HIV response. It was point of pride, especially as Beninois expert in meeting management, Mr. Luc-Armand Bodea, ICASA Director and Coordinator of the Society for AIDS in Africa having led ICASA conferences for over two decades.

He stated that Africa faces a disproportionate burden of HIV/AIDS, necessitating concerted action and collaboration. He underlined the importance of Africa governments ensuring universal access to prevention, testing, treatment, and support, especially for Key and vulnerable populations. Overcoming barriers to care requires inclusive policies and sustained community engagement he stated.
Hon. Prof. Benjamin Hounkpatin, stated that strong leadership, bold vision, and commitment were essential to transforming the HIV/AIDS response in Africa. He finally called for regional collaboration towards achieving the goal of an AIDS-free Africa.

Dr. Aliou Sylla, Secretary General, Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA)

Dr. Aliou Sylla, Secretary General of the Society for AIDS in Africa (SAA), presented key points on the SAA and ICASA (International Conference on AIDS and STIs in Africa). He provided an overview of the organizational framework on SAA’s governance structure. He followed up with SAA Core Values, the principles guiding the SAA’s mission and vision. He also provided a brief into ICASA’s history, highlighting the background and evolution of the conference.

Dr. Sylla reiterated the importance of High-Level Leadership Commitments to End AIDS as well as SAA’s efforts to receive commitment and support from influential leaders. Some influential leaders such as former President, H.E. George Bush Jnr at ICASA 2011, Ethiopia, President H.E. Alassane Ouattara at ICASA 2017, Cote D’Ivoire, President H.E. Paul Kagame at ICASA 2019 Rwanda, Deputy President H.E David Mabuza at ICASA 2021 Durban and President H.E. Filipo Nyusl, President of Mozambique amongst other high-level dignitaries have graced the ICASA platform over the years to facilitate high level commitment and policy implementation. He then proceeded to provide the relevance of ICASA and the importance of the conference in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Dr. Sylla mentioned the trend in ICASA Attendees, providing statistics on ICASA Attendees over the past 5 conferences. ICASA has reached over 500,000 people. He shared insights into ICASA and SAA Financial Reports by emphasizing on the Financial Audit by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) exactly 3 months after every ICASA. This was followed by brief description of SAA Organogram and ICASA Structure and governance.
Furthermore Dr. Sylla provided a brief summary on how to host ICASA. He also acknowledged the very important role of Public and Private Partnerships in organizing ICASA and called on more future collaborations to support the organization of the conference. He also highlighted a few benefits of the Impact of ICASA on the Host country. Dr. Sylla provided future infrastructure plans for a proposed Ultra-Modern Headquarters for the Society for AIDS in Africa and called on support from Donor partners and African governments to make this project a reality.

In conclusion his presentation underscored the comprehensive governance, impactful leadership, and significant contributions of ICASA and SAA in combating HIV/AIDS in Africa.

Prof. Morenike Ukpong, Treasurer, Society for AIDS in Africa

Prof. Morenike Ukpong, SAA Treasurer, as the Chairperson of the event, on behalf of the Society for AIDS in Africa, delivered the vote of thanks. She extended her heartfelt gratitude to Hon. Prof. Benjamin Hounkpatin, Minister of Health of the Benin Republic, for his presence and unwavering support for public health initiatives.

Prof. Ukpong thanked the Government of Benin and His Excellency President Patrice Talon for their leadership and remarkable progress towards the 95-95-95 HIV targets.

She also expressed her deep appreciation to the SAA Executive Board members, especially Hon. Dr. David Pagwesese Parirenyatwa, for their dedication, guidance and invaluable leadership.

Prof. Ukpong thanked all distinguished guests and members of the diplomatic corps and participants from across Africa for their strong mobilization and commitment to our cause. She stated that continued collaboration was essential in achieving our goal of an AIDS-free Africa.
Cross section of Invited guests, the SAA Executive Board, The Minister of Health and the Diplomatic Corps

Link to picture gallery of the SAA Cocktail event: https://www.saafrica.org/pages/gallery/32nd-saa-board-meeting-benin/