

SECOND INTERNATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF TOURNONS LA PAGE

January 23 to 26, 2023
Cotonou, Benin



NARRATIVE REPORT



TOURNONS LA PAGE

Narrative Report - International General
Assembly of Tournons La Page
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Monday 23/01

Reflection on the restriction of
civic space and meeting of
specialized committees



DAY

Opening ceremony of the International General Assembly

The opening ceremony of the second international General Assembly (GA) of Tournons La Page (TLP) gathered more than **120 members, partners and guests** from different backgrounds. After warmly thanking the various partners who made this meeting possible, President Marc Ona Essangui delivered a speech highlighting the motivations behind the relocation of this event, initially planned in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In a region plagued by coups d'état, Benin stands out as an exception, particularly in view of its commitment to the principle of a two-term presidential limit in the Constitution and the commitment of President Patrice Talon to step down at the end of his term. A tribute was then paid to the activists currently detained for their daily fight for democracy and good governance in their country.

"Today, democracy is threatened by the return of authoritarianism. We must act accordingly to fight them." - Marc Ona Essangui, President of Tournons La Page

Through a pre-recorded video, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association, Clément Voule, described the **democratic regression observed worldwide in the face of the rise of authoritarian regimes**, which is illustrated by an alarming decline of civic space.

Despite political stability, Benin shows some worrying signals regarding the limitation of the scope of action of Beninese civil society. In this regard, the president of the Beninese Human Rights Commission took the floor to highlight the increasing control of the expression of fundamental freedoms and the crucial role of civil societies in the defense of human rights.

Roundtable - Restricting Civic Space, Responses from Around the World

In order to continue and nourish the reflections developed during the opening ceremony, Rodrigue Ahego (journalist and member of TLP-Togo), Marc Ona Essangui (president of TLP), Sandrine Nkurikiye (journalist and member of TLP-Burundi) and Saba Hosseini Memar (member of the ROJA collective) met around a round table, the opportunity to combine the realities of the restriction of civic space in Africa and elsewhere

"Today, the question on civic space has no borders, it challenges everyone." - Rodrigue Ahego, journalist and member of TLP-Togo

The observation is shared: civic space is increasingly threatened throughout the world. If in Togo, liberticide laws have been enacted and the fundamental freedoms of association, expression and assembly are restricted, in Iran, discriminatory policies and repression targeting women who dare to oppose the authorities in power and assert their rights have given rise to large-scale popular uprisings which have been severely repressed.

"We are fighting similar battles even though we come from different continents." - Saba Hosseini Memar, member of the Roja collective

In Burundi, protests against former president Pierre Nkurunziza's third term in office were also repressed in 2015, independent media denouncing these blunders were censored and human rights defenders were forced into exile.

In the course of the discussions, numerous ideas were put forward in order to remedy this blockage of civic space, including:

- Increase citizen awareness and empowerment;
- Increase advocacy with major democracies to penalize leaders who violate democratic rules;
- Intervene with international donors to make them face their responsibilities;
- Create solidarity between peoples.



Roundtable - Restricting Civic Space, Responses from Around the World

As part of a process to improve the governance of TLP, a time of reflection was organized to define and appropriate the values of the movement. While the motivation behind TLP membership is consensual- namely the promotion of democratic change - its values are subject to many personal interpretations.

President Marc Ona Essangui presented the core values of TLP:

- **Solidarity:** to get together, to share ideas, to show tolerance
- **Mutual commitment:** to unite and act in favor of democracy
- **Prospection:** to create independent counter-powers placing the citizen at the heart of the political debate
- **Freedom:** to be able to exercise citizen control over public action with an independent justice system where all citizens are on the same level

These discussions are part of an **imperative to set an example and ensure internal consistency** by examining how to align TLP's governance - in other words, its internal operations - functioning with its vision, values and principles of action.

Meeting with the Protection referents

Considering that the Protection program will finish at the end of March, the meeting of the Protection referents provides an opportunity to review the activities carried out over the past three years. Thanks to its success, many defenders arrested for their commitment have been released and placed in a more peaceful environment. Assistance has also been provided to the families of the victims. In addition to physical protection, the program relied on another lever: digital security. Several training sessions were given to secure the data of members who are the main targets of cyberattacks. At the conclusion of this meeting, recommendations were formulated in order to continue the work done, notably to **organize a physical meeting of the Protection referents** in order to better orient the axes of the protection activities, but also to **plan a seminar between the Protection referents and the pool of TLP lawyers** in order to optimize the protection of the members.

Meeting with the Pool of Lawyers

In parallel, the pool of TLP lawyers met to share experiences, discuss collaboration between lawyers and the TLP movement, highlight achievements in terms of assistance and advocacy, identify expectations, and pay particular attention to the risks and difficulties they face. Although the national contexts differ, the judiciary appears to be experiencing similar dysfunctions, including violations of the rights to a fair trial and access to justice, political interference in judicial affairs, corruption of the judiciary, and manipulation of influence. In order to strengthen their scope of action, the lawyers present expressed the wish to **form a network of TLP lawyers at the international level** to increase the visibility of strategic trials and broaden the protection of human rights defenders, a central part of TLP's field of action.



Meeting with the group of women leaders for democracy

The group of women leaders for democracy met for the first time in order to carry out in person an in-depth analysis of the obstacles to women's involvement in the movement and in civil society organizations in general. Also, this project is distinguished by its integration of the gender dimension through the network of women leaders for democracy, a working group that reflects on the low or even the absence of women's commitment within the movement. Among the obstacles identified, they emphasized their marginalization or even invisibilization, but also the repression they face. These factors fuel a loss of confidence on the one hand, and a fear of expressing themselves and getting involved on the other. As a result, they find themselves excluded from decision-making processes. In order to change this status quo, the women leaders developed an action plan based on the recommendations contained in the women leaders' declaration (see Appendix 1), including:

- Supporting women's initiatives;
- Providing training and raise awareness on women's rights;
- Implementing a quota system that ensures parity within TLP's governance bodies;
- Organizing debates on gender issues.

Workshop - Governance Improvement Process

As part of a process to improve TLP's governance that began in 2022, this workshop aimed to collectively draw the contours of the movement's new governance so that it would be in line with TLP's vision, values and principles. Khadidja Lahlali, consultant in change management, clarified the role and functioning of each TLP body.

Afterwards, participants were asked to express their expectations and put forward areas of improvement concerning the following themesfor improvement concerning the following themes improvement concerning the following themesfor improvement concerning the following themes:

1

- **The West-Central Africa divide:** differences in socio-political circumstances were noted, but the use of the term "divide" caused much debate. It is essential to respect the perceptible differences while valuing the contribution of each coalition to the construction of the movement.

2

- **Women in the TLP movement:** it is imperative to ensure that TLP texts are respected and promote parity within the governing bodies. This can be achieved through the establishment of a gender dialogue or the implementation of quotas.

3

- **The functioning of national coalitions:** a need for capacity building and cohesion between coalitions was expressed in order to allow synergies of action.

4

- **The European coalition:** several scenarios were considered regarding the role of this coalition in relation to the African coalitions and in the TLP movement in general.

5

- **Renewal and sustainability of the movement:** beyond strengthening the capacities of members, renewal implies defining a policy that encourages older members to give up their positions, creating a regulatory body or setting up a process for increasing responsibility within the movement.

6

- **The economic model:** reflections focused on the need to raise funds, through campaigns, selling goodies, organizing events. Coalitions also expressed their desire to strengthen their fundraising capacities.

DAY 2



Tuesday 24/01
Training

Workshop: What is behind the term "anti-French sentiment"?

TLP has broadened its repertoire of action by conducting an action research project - in collaboration with Sciences Po Paris - on "anti-French sentiment", which has now become inextricably linked with French-speaking countries in Africa. During a first moving debate, participants agreed on the use of the term by the French authorities, but there was considerable debate as to how this phenomenon came about. While some believe that it has been gaining momentum since the early 1990s - or even more recently - to justify France's policy of interference, others claim that the sentiment is much older. A brainstorming session was then held to identify the themes underpinning criticism of France today, as well as the actors and personalities behind it. There are many sources of tension, from the monetary system (the CFA franc) to military occupation and support for dictators, not to mention the plundering of resources. Criticism of French foreign policy is voiced not only by African leaders, but also by civil society players, researchers, academics and religious leaders. Finally, participants were invited to list the consequences for TLP, including the creation of confusion due to the circulation of false information. With this in mind, **it is all the more important to strengthen our work with French policymakers, to advocate a more coherent diplomacy calling for respect for human rights and to raise awareness among citizens, so that they themselves are in a position to challenge the authorities.**



Round table - Popular resistance to state violence

Hosted by the [Center for Research and Information for Development](#) (CRID), a round table was formed to discuss popular resistance to state violence, highlighting the wide range of methods of self-organization and collective demands against systemic state violence.

While these are expressed in various forms, the willingness to come together and fight jointly for a common cause crosses borders. In Brazil, Nivia Raposo and Rute Silva Santos of the Network of Mothers of Victims of State Violence in Baixada Fluminense (a suburb of Rio de Janeiro) point out that this violence takes the form of forced disappearances orchestrated by the State and executions perpetrated by the police and/or armed groups. In order to denounce these abuses of power, actions of interpellation, networking, and political education are carried out. In France, Fatou Dieng and Mélanie Gaham N'Goye presented the [Réseau d'Entraide Vérité et Justice](#) as well as the [Vies Volées](#) and [Les Mutilé-e-s pour l'exemple](#) collectives, which were built in reaction to police violence by the French state in the public space. Financial support has been given to the families of the victims, marches are organized and legal support is provided. Finally, Suhail Halayka of the [Addameer](#) association spoke about the attacks perpetrated in Palestine in the context of the Israeli occupation, which take the form of reports discrediting NGOs, the detention of their members, and a tightening of the conditions for granting funding. The association provides legal assistance to political prisoners and carries out solidarity campaigns to denounce violations of their rights.



Workshop - Documenting Human Rights Violations

Documenting human rights violations is a central part of TLP's advocacy work. The process behind this work was thoroughly analyzed by Adama Dembele, a representative of the [Freedom House](#). It begins with a planning phase, where a security plan is put in place and a coordination system is established. Then, information is collected. During this stage, it is necessary to ensure that concrete evidence is available, to contact resource persons and to cross-reference sources. This information is analyzed, the facts are re-characterized, and a report is produced. It is on the basis of this report that advocacy work is undertaken, the courts may also be called upon and assistance is provided to the victims of these violations. Throughout the process, it is important to take into account the confidentiality mechanism, the security of the information and the proper review of the information collected. Following this presentation, participants were invited to collectively formulate recommendations. Emphasis was placed on the need to improve the protection system in order to better protect victims, but also to train human rights defenders in the drafting of reports on human rights violations.

Conference - First feedbacks on TLP's capitalization experience

Since the launch of the transnational campaign in 2014, [Secours Catholique-Caritas France \(SCCF\)](#) had been coordinating the movement internationally. It was only in 2020 that a process of autonomization was initiated. This became clearer with the legal recognition of TLP as an association governed by the French law of 1901. A capitalization process during this year, in collaboration with the SCCF, with a view to agreeing on a common history, from the incubation to the autonomization of the movement, giving a voice to the players involved, listing best practices and also promoting this experience to the networks of both associations. To achieve this, a number of questionnaires and semi-directive interviews were conducted, the results of which have been compiled in a report on the experience to be published in the spring of 2023.

DAY 2



Workshop - Analyzing the security cooperation of African countries

Representatives of the association [Survie](#), Riwadi Saidi and Laurène Lepeytre have conducted an inventory of the security cooperation of African countries with France. Currently, France has a military presence in 28 African countries. The cooperation in question can take several forms: it can be of **substitution**, when France leads African armies, or of **partnership** when France advises them. It is also important to distinguish between structural cooperation, and is aimed at strengthening the sovereign powers of partner countries and combating terrorism over the long term, and **operational cooperation**, which is the responsibility of the Ministries of the Interior and Defense, and takes the form of one-off support or training missions for operations. With a view to examining this vast subject in greater depth, a number of areas for reflection were discussed, including the need to **raise awareness among the general public and elected representatives**, as well as the need to **promote citizen control in France and Africa in order to gain access to better information**. The creation of a specific working group within TLP on security cooperation would also be an interesting lever.

Round Table - Popular revolts and internationalist resistance

Echoing the morning's roundtable on popular resistance to state violence, CRID hosted a second roundtable focusing on popular movements and internationalist resistance, emphasizing the **key role of transnational networking through diasporas and other alliances**. Mayada Alkeba and Nathan Caillierez of [La Cantine Syrienne](#) shared their approach to organizing from France to denounce the political regime of Bashar El Assad in Syria. La Cantine Syrienne has created the festival "Les Peuples Veulent", which encourages the formation of a network of political links and trust. Saba Hosseini Memar of the [Roja collective](#) emphasized the support between collectives, the networking that allows the circulation of information (supported by alternative media) and the importance of "building bridges" with diverse fights. Finally, Alassane Dicko of the [Africa Europe Interact](#) network presented the [Malian association of deportees](#) which works to raise awareness about the treatment of Malian people exiled in Europe. The association's scope of action has been extended through transnational networking, which has enabled us to set up early warning systems, link up support groups before and after expulsions, and carry out large-scale actions, such as the caravan for freedom of movement on the bangs of the World Social Forum in Dakar in 2011.



Workshop - Managing a collective association

Responding to a need expressed within the movement in terms of organizational management, this workshop led by Hervé Riols and Paul Samangassou began by reviewing the inherent characteristics of any association, i.e. individuals sharing common values who join forces behind a shared vision with clear, transparent objectives with a view to moving in the same direction. This vision is translated into strategic approaches and mobilizes resources (human, technical and financial). The management of an associative collective was then discussed. TLP coalitions are first and foremost associative structures that come together to form a collective at national level. The organizations that make it up do not necessarily have the same field of action, which is why it is important to make concessions to prevent potential conflicts of interest. Managing a collective is all the more complex given the frustrations, personal agendas and priorities of each structure.

Discussions have brought to light several points of attention that are likely to create dissension or even paralyze the movement: the lack of legal recognition of coalitions, the approximate application of structuring texts, and the concern for transparency and accountability to donors. To overcome these sources of tension, it is essential to **form a synergy between the coalitions** and to overcome these divisions regarding legal recognition.

Conference - Introduction to Sociocracy

Thought by Gerard Endenburg, the Dutch engineer and John Buck propose in their book *Sociocracy, the creative forces of self-organization to define sociocracy* (also called "dynamic governance" or "shared governance") as a *"method of governance that organizes the sharing of power to allow each member of an organization to have a maximum of power to act within that organization, with a view to the achievement of the set missions and goal, while regulating the abuses of power that could occur."*

Sociocracy has a wide range of tools:

- **Equivalence and the circle as a decision-making space:** each person within the same circle can influence and consent or not to a decision that will affect him/her. In other words, each person is equivalent to the others, regardless of his or her position in the organization.
- **Decision-making by consent:** this method implies that no one has any objection. Among other things, this allows for shared decision making.
- **Election without candidates:** the allocation of mandates is done on the basis of shared criteria, without a candidate declared beforehand and the ballots are not secret. The mandates are thus attributed to the people considered the most suitable.
- **The double link:** every circle is linked to the upper circle by at least one representative, who is on an equal footing with the other members of that circle. He/she participates in decisions that may affect its functions and in orientations that concern him/her.

In addition to these four tools, sociocracy emphasizes **three places for group work:**



- Strategic decision circle
- Ad hoc commission or focus group
- Working or coordination meeting

Finally, it is worth distinguishing the three relative functions of governance as presented by John Buck and Gerard Endenburg in their book cited above:

- **Guidance:** decision-making and drafting of mission specifications
- **Execution:** implementation of the guidelines on the basis of the specifications drawn up by the competent bodies
- **Control and regulation:** verification of compliance and consistency with the specifications (measuring, controlling and validating deviations)

DAY 3

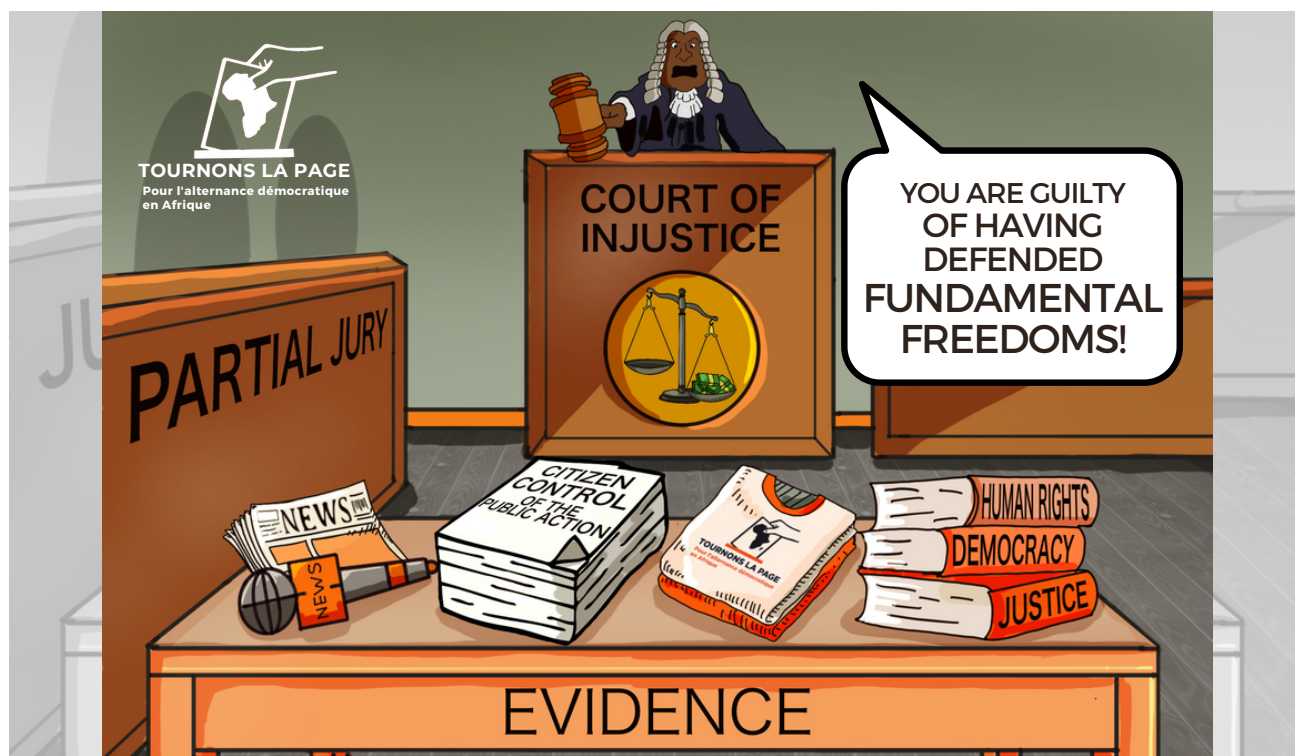


Wednesday 25/01
Decision-making elective day

Presentation of the moral report

After referring to the genesis of Tournons La Page, President Marc Ona Essangui recalled the process of empowerment from the SCCF undertaken. From legal recognition to the provision of its own governing bodies and offices, TLP has become a true international citizen movement. The President then justified the relocation of this international GA due to political, budgetary, security and organizational constraints. Before concluding, a tribute was paid to [pro-democracy activists who were arrested for their commitment](#), such as Floriane Irangabiye, Jean-Rémi Yama and Prince Fadel. This moral report concluded with the worrying observation that democracies are retreating in the face of the rise of authoritarianism.

This moral report was adopted with 18 votes out of 25.



Presentation of TLP International's 2022 Annual Report

Laurent Duarte, Executive Secretary, stood before the audience to present the activity report summarizing the transversal actions that were carried out by the International Secretariat (IS) in 2022. Firstly, the position and role of the IS in relation to the four structuring axes was emphasized:

- **Citizen mobilization:** the IS accompanies the construction of a social base capable of putting pressure on States
- **Advocacy and communication:** IS supports the coalitions in challenging the States at the national and regional levels
- **Protection of members:** IS provides assistance to those in prison and to the families of victims
- **Capacity building and governance:** IS empowers members to take action and develop new skills

This was followed by a presentation of TLP's main projects:

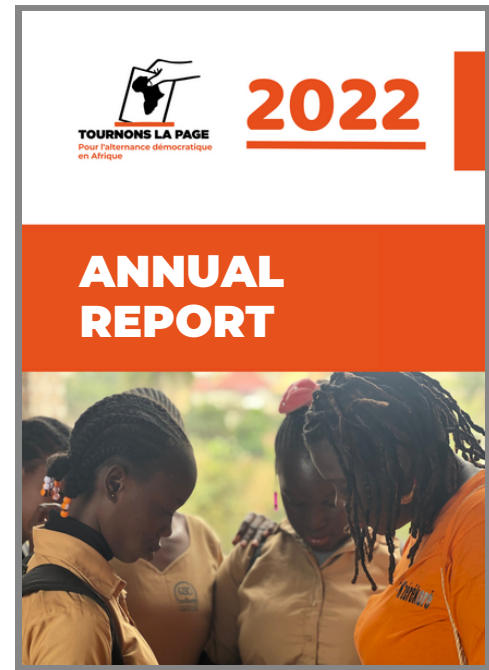
- **Triennial:** a program financed in large part by the SCCF that aims to support capacity building of the movement and its members, to support the IS as a network leader and to provide financial and technical support to African coalitions.
- **Advocacy:** supported by [Misereor](#), this project aims to strengthen TLP's advocacy in Africa and Europe by producing reports and enabling advocacy missions at all levels.
- **Protection:** funded in large part by [Voice](#) and piloted jointly with [Agir ensemble pour les droits humains](#), support is provided to human rights defenders and training is given on physical and digital protection.

- **Citizens' campaign for term limits:** financed by the [National Democratic Institute](#) (NDI), CRID, [CCFD-Terre Solidaire](#) and Voice, this campaign carries the message loud and clear of a two-term presidential limit.
- **Communication:** in addition to the SCCF, the support of the [Fondation de France](#) contributes to the reinforcement of the IS, to the animation of the network, to the development of a quality internal and external communication.

Finally, after mentioning the numerous reports and other documents published, the financial report was given particular attention, which highlighted the important dependence on the SCCF.

This annual report was adopted with 21 votes out of 25.

[Read the 2022 Annual Report here](#)



Presentation of the main activities of the national coalitions

Representatives from each coalition were invited to present the key activities that have been carried out since they joined TLP.

- In **Burundi**, a study on the state of democracy in the country was carried out and sent to the Burundian authorities. In addition, a strategic lawsuit was conducted against Pierre Nkurunziza's illegal third term in 2015.
- In **Cameroon**, the fortieth anniversary of Paul Biya in power was celebrated. A awareness and mobilization tour was undertaken to enlist commitment.
- In **Congo**, the coalition developed a digital application to train election observers.
- In **Côte d'Ivoire**, a report was published on human rights violations committed during the 2020 presidential elections, and a monitoring committee for the electoral revision was set up.
- In **Europe**, the coalition was not really structured until November 2022, when a roadmap was drawn up and its mandate and strategic axes for the year 2023 were defined.
- In **Gabon**, an election observation system has been set up, as well as software for compiling results. Campaigns against arbitrary arrests were also conducted.
- In **Guinea**, following a planning mission between the different regions, citizen awareness committees were created to inform citizens about civil liberties, and educational talks were also held in several regions to understand the challenges of democracy.

- In **Niger**, a national forum between political authorities was organized to bring political parties together on the electoral issue, the citizen's house was created, and a report on the shrinking of civic space was produced.
- In the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, several reports were produced jointly with the [European Network for Central Africa](#) (EURAC), mobilizations took place to denounce the armed conflicts in the East, and support was provided to disadvantaged local communities.
- In **Chad**, capacity building activities on civil liberties took place. There was also a campaign on the restriction of civic space.
- In **Togo**, the coalition is very involved in the campaign for term limits that it is piloting.



Presentation and validation of the 2022 financial report

Brigitte Ameganvi, member of the TLP Board as Treasurer, presented the financial report in several parts: first the provisional financial statement for 2022, then the achievements for 2020-2022, and finally the presentation of the financial challenges of the next three-year plan for 2023-2025.

- **2022 Financial Review**

The 2022 budget is balanced in terms of revenues and expenses. However, TLP depends on a very limited number of donors with SCCF and Misereor together accounting for 73% of TLP's revenues. However, this is becoming less true due to the diversification of donors. For the year 2022, a 33% increase in the estimated budget was noted.

- **Achievements 2020-2022**

Regarding the 2020-2022 achievements, the initial budget of 300,000 euros has doubled to 600,000 euros in 2022. With such a significant growth in such a short time, readjustments are necessary.

- **Three-year plan 2023-2025**

Two scenarios have been imagined:

- Ambitious: budget of one million euros per year, over three years
- Reasonable: from 600,000 euros in 2023 to 800,000 in 2025

The financial report presented shows the funds received by the national coordination but does not take into account the funds received directly by the coalitions on the ground, which distorts the overall vision of the funding received.

The financial report was adopted unanimously with 25 votes out of 25.

Presentation of the 2023-2025 strategic plan

The 2023-2025 strategic plan developed by the IS is a guide for the coalitions, which can use it as inspiration to formulate their own. This point of attention has led to the re-specification of the IS's position with respect to the national coalitions:

- Playing a catalytic role: building the conditions for the movement to be open and dynamic
- Logic of subsidiarity and dialogue: the coalitions are autonomous but this relationship must be based on dialogue and a common set of specifications
- Accompanist and organizer: set up transversal activities, support the emergence of ideas

Laurent Duarte then took stock of the previous axes of intervention before identifying new ones, including **making TLP a school of democracy**. This axis aspires to cross and valorize militant knowledge. A section will be dedicated to training - internal and external - in order to strengthen our expertise. Also, the axis dedicated to the **creation of a solidarity network** refers to the help brought to members in danger, to the animation of formal and informal groups, and to the weaving of alliances within networks following the example of [the Human Rights Platform](#) (PDH). Finally, the **involvement of the most vulnerable groups** implies questioning the integration of women and young people, overcoming rivalries, and developing a strategy to have a stronger anchoring at the local level.



Presentation of the new national coalitions



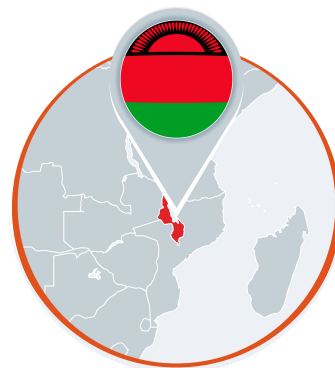
Benin

Initial contacts were made at the Cotonou Summit in July 2021. Numerous organizations have gradually shown their interest and the membership process is now coming to fruition, with six motivated organizations that have a wide range of expertise. The presence of Anna Simon, Advocacy Officer, is helping to support this coalition.

The TLP-Benin coalition was voted in with 24 out of 25 votes.

Malawi

Ten organizations have applied to join TLP. No sponsoring coalition has yet been named. These organizations seem very serious, committed and professional. The IS team needs to strengthen its knowledge of the socio-political context of this country. The validation of this coalition will be decided at a future steering committee meeting or at an extraordinary GA.



Mali

Given the current political environment, the launch of a coalition in Mali represents a real opportunity. However, it is necessary to first ensure the degree of independence of certain organizations by taking a closer look at their profile.



The TLP-Mali coalition was voted in with 19 out of 25 votes.



Uganda

In 2021, Janvier Bigirimana went to Uganda to visit TLP-Burundi members there. Five member organizations have expressed interest in joining TLP. They are distinguished by their diverse areas of intervention, from climate justice to community development. The representatives of these organizations are determined and subject to repression by the Ugandan authorities. However, it's essential to include organizations present in the capital to raise awareness among a wider audience.

The TLP-Uganda coalition was voted in by 24 out of 25 votes.

Renewal of the members of the steering committee and the Board

Before proceeding with the renewal of the members of the COPIL and the Board, Khadidja Lahlali reminded the participants of the mandate of each governance body, based on the TLP statutes. The participants then listed the qualities required to hold a position within these two bodies. These included availability, involvement, integrity, the ability to build consensus, the ability to listen and to work for the common good.

Within the coalitions, the individuals eligible to be a member of the steering committee, are as follows: Janvier Bigirimana (TLP-Burundi), Jean-Marc Bikoko (TLP-Cameroon), Alexandre Amani (TLP-CI), Brice Mackosso (TLP-Congo), Philippe Morié (TLP-Europe), Nathalie Zemo, Abdoulaye Oumou Sow (TLP-Guinea) (replacing Ibrahima Diallo), Issa Garba (TLP-Niger) (replacing Maikoul Zodi), Jean-Chrysostome Kijana, Jacques Ngarassal, David Dosseh (TLP-Togo).

Regarding the qualified personalities sitting on the steering committee, Brigitte Ameganvi was elected with 22 votes out of 24, as well as Louise Avon and Marc Ona Essangui with 19 and 17 votes out of 24 respectively.

At the Board level, Marc Ona Essangui was reappointed as President with 23 votes out of 25, as was Brigitte as Treasurer with 23 votes. Janvier Bigirimana was appointed vice-president with 21 votes.

Finally, during the discussions, the members insisted on the need to review TLP's structuring texts which contain some discrepancies. In this regard, it was decided at a steering meeting to set up an *ad hoc* commission to improve TLP's governance and decision-making processes, including a proposal to revise these texts.

The creation of this committee was adopted by 23 votes out of 25.

Following an election, it was decided that it would be composed of the following persons: Laurent Duarte, Hervé Riols, Brigitte Ameganvi, Janvier Bigirimana, Saadatou Sourgo, Edith Mekina, Karim Tonko and Agnès Metougou.



Thursday 26/01

**Closing of the International
General Assembly**



DAY

Press conference

To close this GA, a press conference was held in the presence of Brigitte Ameganvi, Marc Ona Essangui, Janvier Bigirimana and Ousmane Diallo who answered questions from thirty journalists invited for the occasion. Prior to this, the panelists read the **Cotonou Declaration on Democracy, the Rule of Law, and Respect for Constitutional Principles in Africa**, which was drafted as a result of the three days of work (see Appendix 2).

After mentioning the mainspring to be of TLP, Marc Ona Essangui focused on the choice of Benin to hold this international meeting.

Another question concerned the process and criteria for membership. Any individual or organization can join the network. TLP is a non-partisan movement that carries out a plurality of non-violent actions to advocate for democratic change and to denounce all actions that impede this change, including the restriction of civic space or the holding of irregular elections. In this sense, the organizations that apply for membership must meet these criteria.

The GA ended with the panelists clarifying the position of TLP, which should not be perceived as a European movement that imposes its vision of democracy on African countries. On the contrary, it is a free gathering that allows for a synergy of action. Human rights and democracy are universal values that transcend borders.



Cultural outing

To celebrate the end of the GA and to take advantage of the richness of Cotonou, an optional cultural outing was planned in the afternoon to the [Fondation Zinsou](#), which hosts numerous exhibitions throughout the year and showcases contemporary African artworks.

Networking night

To finish this week well, a networking night was organized at Le Lieu Unique to celebrate the end of a GA that was rich and intense. If the meeting times were limited throughout the week, this evening was the perfect opportunity for meetings and exchanges in a more informal setting. It was also animated by the Togolese artist Don Stash, who did the musical entertainment.

EVALUATION



**Overall evaluation of the
International
General Assembly**

A meeting that kept its promises

After being postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and relocated only a few months before, this GA is considered a success, both in terms of timeliness, logistics and content. **It succeeded in gathering more than 120 people, representing more than 20 nationalities.** This allowed for enriching meetings and exchanges with people from different backgrounds and fighting for multiple causes. This environment was ideal for disseminating knowledge, sharing best practices and creating real synergy between all participants. In this sense, external guests who were unfamiliar with TLP were able to familiarize themselves with the movement, meet its members and discuss possible avenues of collaboration and joint action.

Improving governance was also the main theme of this international meeting. The governance support process initiated last year continued at this AGM, with numerous workshops and plenary sessions aimed at outlining the contours of more transparent, inclusive and ethical governance. Major advances were welcomed, such as the creation of an *ad hoc* joint commission whose main mission is to propose a revision of TLP's structuring texts. This initiative is the result of a mature and honest realization that the application of TLP's texts remains at times relative.

Another highlight was the reading of the declaration by TLP's women leaders on the second day. The declaration reflects the willingness to take the gender dimension into account.



A two-step preparation

Intended to be held in Kinshasa, a coordination team was set up to facilitate exchanges between TLP-RDC members and the International Secretariat team. Over the months, however, a number of constraints paralyzed the progress of preparations and led to the event being relocated. Indeed, with the cost of living so high, the budget we had at our disposal did not allow us to cover all the planned expenses. Also, the administrative formalities involved in setting foot on Congolese soil are laborious and time-consuming. There was a significant risk that most of the participants would not be able to obtain their visas in time, and therefore not be physically present. Finally, as we had not received the support of the Congolese authorities, we were not immune to a last-minute ban.

After learning about these obstacles, the steering committee decided following a meeting at the end of October to change the venue of the GA. Several options had been put forward but Benin had the best conditions. In addition to enjoying a certain political stability, the country has certain advantages, notably a rather low cost of living and a visa exemption for nationals of African countries. In addition, TLP had already taken part in the second West African summit on good governance, alternation and democracy, which was held at the Palais des Congrès in Cotonou in July 2021. Finally, the presence of Anna Simon (IS employee) on site as a focal point allowed for liaison and coordination with the IS on logistics.

The difficulties met

By changing locations only a few months before the GA began, all the work that had been undertaken during 2022 had to be redone. This lack of time put a lot of pressure on the shoulders of the IS, which redoubled its efforts in the face of this heavy workload. In this context, the logistics were difficult because of the rush. With the GA fast approaching, it was particularly difficult to find plane tickets for some participants on the desired dates. Many flights to Cotonou were fully booked and others had long stopovers.

Similarly, participants regretted a lack of communication prior to the event, particularly the sending of the program only a few days before the official start.



Recommendations for the next events

A satisfaction survey was elaborated and shared with all participants in order to collect their general opinion on the event, the positive and negative points, but above all the ways to improve for the next meetings.

Among the answers to the survey, several proposals were retained:

- Anticipate possible constraints/obstacles;
- Accommodate the participants in one place;
- Establish a protocol for reporting any sexist or sexual acts and/or remarks;
- Develop a procedure in case of hospitalization;
- Organize the networking night during the first few days to encourage meetings;
- Provide interpretation for the workshops;the workshops;
- Invite more international journalists;
- Solicit more involvement from the governance bodies in the preparation and animation of the event.



APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Declaration for the effective involvement of women leaders in the Tournons La Page movement

This declaration was drafted by the group of women leaders of Tournons La Page (TLP), composed of women involved in the movement within national TLP coalitions in Burundi, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and Togo. This text is in line with the values and principles promoted in the Charter and Statutes of the movement, namely the respect and defense of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the promotion of democracy, the equality of individuals in rights and opportunities, and international and national solidarity. It seeks to overcome political, ethnic and/or religious divisions.

The group of women leaders is a working group created to encourage women's leadership and to identify, understand and analyze the factors limiting their effective involvement in the movement.

Considering that in order to make women's voices truly heard, it is essential to take into account the constraints that limit their involvement in issues related to development, human rights, democracy and political leadership;

Observing that communication and transparency, the foundations of governance and democratic management in TLP, are an obstacle to the recognition of the work done by women in the movement;

Noting that the low level of women's involvement in TLP's governance bodies hinders the full achievement of its objectives and priorities;

Knowing that gender-sensitive interventions and attitudinal change of attitude to promote women's rights are little questioned at TLP;

Asserting that initiatives, programs, and policies at the national, regional, and international levels to prevent and respond to women's needs remain the basis for future progress toward women's development;

Recalling TLP's commitment to the fundamental laws, principles, norms, agreements and treaties in force at the national, regional and international levels guaranteeing the inalienable rights of women;

We, women leaders committed to the Tournons La Page movement, participating in the international General Assembly in Cotonou as a recognized working group within the movement,

Call on all members of the movement TLP to redefine its priorities and to take action in order to:

- Strengthen the capacities of women to play a key role in decision making and to exercise responsibilities within the movement;
- Provide gender sensitization training for members of the movement's governance, project managers and all actors with responsibilities within the movement;
- To define a quota of women to ensure their full participation in the governance structures of the movement at national and international levels;
- Integrate the gender dimension in TLP's statutes, campaigns, activities and budgets, at the national and international levels, to ensure that the specificities of gender are taken into account within the governance bodies;
- Mobilize human and financial resources for women's activities;
- Improve information sharing so that women are aware of decisions made within the movement and of ongoing activities;
- Define the status of this group of women leaders within the coalitions by developing regulatory texts;
- Set up a tool to follow up on the recommendations outlined.

Appendix 2: Cotonou Declaration on Democracy, Rule of Law and Respect for Constitutional Principles in Africa

From January 23 to 26, 2023, the General Assembly of Tournons La Page (TLP) was held in Cotonou. This important event in the life of TLP saw the participation of more than a hundred actors from Africa, Europe, America and the Middle East, including representatives of TLP's national coalitions, representatives of coalitions aspiring to membership, partner organizations as well as representatives of technical and financial partners.

At the conclusion of this event, we, the members of the Tournons La Page General Assembly, declare the following:

1. First of all, we warmly thank all the technical and financial partners, the international secretariat as well as all the people who contributed to the holding and the success of this event. We thank in particular the Beninese authorities for the hospitality shown to the various delegates.
2. We regret that in many of the countries represented, there are still enormous challenges to democratic changeover, the rule of law, respect for constitutional principles and human rights. Dictatorial and repressive reflexes, exclusionary and the bad governance practices, electoral fraud, oppression against TLP members and pro-democracy actors, military and constitutional coups, terrorism and armed conflicts are all problems that affect our countries and constitute serious handicaps to the emergence of a true democracy.
3. We condemn the growing restriction of civic space and all the consequences that this situation has on the lives of citizens. Thus, we strongly condemn the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of our colleagues Ibrahima Diallo, Oumar Sylla and Mamadou Billo Bah in Guinea, Jean Rémy Yama in Gabon, Prince Fadel in Togo and Floriane Irangabiye in Burundi, who were arrested for their work as citizens' monitors and for denouncing violations. We unanimously call for their unconditional release and we reaffirm our full support for them. These dissuasive and repressive practices initiated by some governments will neither discourage us nor prevent us from continuing our citizen's struggle in favor of democracy, the rule of law, the respect of constitutional principles and the equality of citizens before the law.

4. In many countries, citizens are not equal in terms of law. Discriminatory practices based on political affiliation have become common, creating all kinds of frustrations. The instrumentalization of justice is such that the latter has become a tool of repression, subjected to the will of the executive power instead of being a power that protects the citizens.

- We note with regret that some Heads of State in office have already expressed their desire to remain
5. in power in violation of constitutional principles related to presidential term limits, practices that threaten the stability of countries and the achievements of democracy while undermining the future of the youth of their countries.

- We are aware of the central role of women and youth in the different countries. In order to maintain
6. the TLP network and make it relevant to the realities of our contexts of action, we are committed to the progressive and effective inclusion of youth and women in all its structures and more particularly in decision-making bodies.

- We are pleased and proud to welcome new Tournons La Page coalitions in Benin, Malawi, Mali and
7. Uganda. We welcome these new coalitions who have chosen to join our network, we are convinced that their membership will strengthen TLP and vice versa.

From all of the above:

- TLP renews its commitment to democracy, respect for constitutional principles on presidential term limits, the rule of law, equality of all before the law and the opening of civic space.
- TLP calls on the governments of Burundi, Gabon, Guinea and Togo to release our colleagues Floriane Irangabiye, Jean Rémy Yama, and Prince Fadel who are languishing in prison, prosecuted for their work in defense of human rights and democracy.
- We call on all African leaders to stop state violence against citizens, human rights defenders, and pro-democracy actors and to open up civic space in order to guarantee social stability and the development of populations.
- One Two and No more: No democracy without alternation.



TOURNONS LA PAGE

For democratic power
alternation in Africa

Tournons La Page (TLP) is an international citizens' movement of more than 220 organizations that leads and promotes actions for democratic change in Africa.

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The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of Tournons La Page and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the above mentioned organizations.



ENSEMBLE,
CONSTRUIRE
UN MONDE JUSTE
ET FRATERNEL



MISEREOR
IHR HILFSWERK

