

South African culture featured in BWA congress opening

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DURBAN, South Africa (BNG)—A celebration of South African culture—and the country’s remarkable transformation into “the rainbow nation”—highlighted the opening session of the Baptist World Congress in a colorful display of music and dance.



South Korean pastor Peter Chin at the opening session of the Baptist World Congress. (BNG Photo by Brian Kaylor)The five-day Congress in Durban, the first time the meeting has been held in Africa, has drawn more than 2,500 people from about 80 countries to Indian Ocean coast.

“We welcome you to the rainbow nation,” said Michael Mabuyakhulu, an official of KwaZulu-Natal province, referring to the country’s adopted nickname that reflects its diversity of ethnicities and languages.

African dancers, a Korean children’s choir and contemporary Christian praise bands joined keynote speaker Peter Chin, a South Korean pastor, to interpret the Congress theme, “Jesus Christ, the Door.”

Earlier, BWA leaders said South African’s recent history—its transformation from an oppressive apartheid regime to a multicultural democracy, with forgiveness and reconciliation as key drivers of the largely peaceful change—set an appropriate context for the congress.

The southern African concept of Ubuntu—often translated as “human-ness” or “humanity toward others” and described as a belief in a “universal bond of sharing which connects humanity”—was especially meaningful, they said.



Outgoing BWA president John Upton, BWA General Secretary Neville Callam and Congress Committee Chair Randall Everett, president of the 21st Century Wilberforce Initiative and former BGCT president, speak to the press at the start of the Baptist World Congress in Durban, South Africa. (Baptist General Association of Virginia Photo)The congress theme is “being received in the perspective of Ubuntu,” BWA General Secretary Neville Callam said.

“We have come to see this spirit manifested in Ubuntu,” he noted. “In seeking to probe the depths of the riches of Jesus, we are going beyond our own narrow ecclesiological confines and thinking of the world in which God placed us, a world of many different religions and ideologies.”

Meeting in South Africa is “so absolutely enthralling and inspiring,” Callam said. “It will fill our conference with ... a feeling that we should concern ourselves with the welfare of others, seek ways we can be for others what we want others to be for us, that the welfare of one is a concern of all, that the destiny of one is bound up in the destiny of all.”



Texas Baptist

Executive Director David Hardage (left) talks to Robert Parham of Ethics Daily during the Baptist World Congress. (Ethics Daily Image) Outgoing BWA President John Upton noted, “Humans are experts at building walls,” but added, “Jesus Christ knocks down the dividing walls, and he does it with the cross. “

“As we (the BWA) live into the next five years, what does it mean that Jesus knocks down dividing walls?” he said. “I look forward to seeing what that could possibly mean. It’s going to be an exciting five years. And that conversation could only begin here in South Africa.”