

# COMMITMENT TO BRIDGING THE GAP FOR PEOPLE WITH EPILEPSY IN AFRICA

Prof. Dr. Amadou Gallo DIOP, MD, PhD

## WHO I AM?

I am Professor of Neurology, Epileptology and Neurosciences at the University Hospital of Dakar, Senegal. I was graduated MD in 1988 in Dakar and specialized in Neurology (Universities of Toulouse, France and Dakar, Senegal). I obtained my PhD in Neurobiology in Limoges France 1995 and served as Assistant Professor at the University Hospital of Limoges, for four years. I have also an expertise in Public Health and Health Promotion (University of Nancy, France). I was promoted to the position of Professor of Medicine in 1996 after a continental contest and was ranked first. I am involved in the fight against epilepsy since 1996 after having set up the Senegalese League against epilepsy and started reporting to the world about "Epilepsy in Africa". My participation in several scientific conventions in 53 countries across the world, and having grown in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual environment; make myself a real citizen of the world. All these experiences have given me a global open vision and approach for healthcare and education. Son of a teacher, I am convinced that education and training are the keys for bridging any gap, and go beyond the borders raised by economic, environmental and human factors. A specific characteristic of my personality is to gather people around important goals; try to obtain consensus when there are antagonisms. However, when the time comes for taking a decision, I am able to do so in a gentle and balanced way. With these qualities and your support, I will continue to carry out the ILAE's vision: "*working toward a world where no person's life is limited by epilepsy*".

## WHAT DID I ACHIEVE IN MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE ?

In 1995, after my return from France after four years as Assistant Professor, I have gathered patients, families and health and social professionals to set up the **Senegalese League against Epilepsy**. In my roles as founder and current president, I have contributed to raise awareness among the health professionals, the general population and community leaders. This League is a recognized leader by WHO, International League against Epilepsy (ILAE) and International Bureau for Epilepsy (IBE) which awarded me in 2001, as "**Ambassador for Epilepsy**". I have played a key role in the Global Campaign against Epilepsy by organizing, in Senegal, the very **first Demonstration Project** in Africa. I have been the coordinator and main author of the first WHO advocacy report on "***Epilepsy in the WHO African Region: Bridging the Gap***." This advocacy and policy document intends to raise awareness, fight against taboos and discrimination towards people with epilepsy and reduce the burden of their

condition. We train doctors and paramedics in Dakar and in the region to better diagnose seizures and treat them. School teachers have also been trained on this common disorder among the young, which leads to many cases of school withdrawal due to ignorance. After having given an impulsion for creation of more African Chapters, we have contributed in setting up, in November 2010 in Dakar, the very first **Commission on African Affairs of the ILAE** that I have been nominated by my peers to chair it.

One of the major outcome I have contributed to, is the **African Declaration against Epilepsy**, which has been proclaimed in May 2000. I have been among the main conveners of the very **first African Epilepsy Congress** in Nairobi, in June 2011. The 2<sup>nd</sup> will be organized in Cape Town in May 2014.

Over two decades, I have been also closely involved in promoting training in Neurology and Neurosciences, collaborative researches and initiatives for improving the availability and quality of care for neglected populations. Since 2000, I have been responsible for post graduate education of junior medical staff and trainees coming from 14 African countries, by setting up a **Specialization Certificate in Neurology** in the University of Dakar. This academic course enrolls 25 students from Africa annually. We are proud that over 12 years, we have many graduates who are now serving as Neurology Specialists in every French-speaking sub-Saharan African country. In 2010, I have set up, at Dakar, the first **University Diploma of Epileptology** in Sub-Saharan Africa. Twenty nine trainees from eight African countries have completed this brand new Course. I am the Past-Chairman of the Society of Neuroscientists of Africa (1997-99), which aim is to promote clinical and basic Neurosciences across the continent.

In addition to my University hospital clinical care, very often and in very difficult situations, my team and I travel to rural areas for care delivery and training via two innovative initiatives: '**Neuro-Caravans**' and '**Caravans for Epilepsy**'. I have created these concepts, which entail that in a two-day session of consulting on a large number of people, training health staff, meeting community leaders, intervening in mass media, and caring for patients residing far from capital cities in resources-limited areas. Since May 2005, we have applied these innovative Public Health methodologies for contributing and reducing the Neuro-diagnostic and treatment gap.

Author of over 300 scientific communications and publications, I have been honored to be a co-author of WFN Handbooks on Epilepsy, Public Health and WFN Education Committee's Seminars and also Pedley and Engel's outstanding Epilepsy Textbook. I keep abreast with the latest developments in my fields by undertaking study and professional visits to worldwide renowned Institutions and was able to build partnerships with medical services such as: UCLA, McGill, Heemstede, Tokushima, and several institutions in France and in Africa.

## **WHAT WOULD BE MY NEXT STEPS AS AN ELECTED CHAIRMAN OF THE ILAE'S COMMISSION on AFRICAN AFFAIRS?**

As a co-opted first Chairman of the Commission on African Affairs in November 2010, I have demonstrated my ability of organization and leadership, always in a consensual and friendly manner. The number of Chapters is increasing in Africa. More and more actions are realized in several countries. Regional annual Teaching courses are now in the African and international agendas. As an elected Chair, I will strengthen my mission statement and continue to develop these concrete developmental actions, under the auspices of ILAE and CAA Boards. During my next and last term (2014-2017), I will share with the member-societies, particularly from the African countries, concrete success stories and facts. My origins are from Africa, but I will be dedicated to the world for improving epilepsy management, training and care for the benefits of the patients and the health professionals. My achievements, if ever consecrated by this next election, should give courage to the new generation of Neurologists from everywhere to go beyond any intellectual border and make the world more open with confidence and commitment.

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Dakar, October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2013