

Felix Ngassa Statement for Vice President of Soba America 2019-2021

I believe in SOBA, its mission, vision, and the integrity of my fellow SOBA brethren. Being of service to SOBA and in this case SOBA AMERICA is a huge responsibility that requires focused commitment and attention. I have been fortunate enough to serve as the President of my local chapter, SOBA TRISTATE, and continue to serve in this capacity. At the national level, I have been fortunate to serve as the financial secretary, albeit, this role has come with some unanticipated challenges that I will explain in the paragraphs below.

I believe our SOBA AMERICA culture of “being a brother’s keeper” is robust and I am particularly interested in working collaboratively with Dr. Bertrand Fote to make sure the culture continues to live up to its promise and potential. As a Vice President, I recognize that although we are all working for the common good of SOBA AMERICA, my main role is to work collaboratively with the President and help him advance his vision of SOBA AMERICA.

Proactive listening is inevitable if we have to confront the complex issues that we face as an alumni association. I promise to continue to keep an open mind, to listen to all voices, and practice tolerance and acceptance as we continue the quest to move SOBA AMERICA to the next level of greatness.

As the Financial Secretary of SOBA AMERICA for the past three years, I have worked collaboratively or attempted to work collaboratively with all the members of the Itoe Administration. I came into this administration, three years ago, bringing along two leadership qualities that are very dear to my heart – ***Servant Leadership*** and ***Collaborative Leadership***. Let me explain these qualities in the context of my SOBA AMERICA leadership positions – National Financial Secretary and President of SOBA TRISTATE.

Collaborative Leadership: Due to the logistical challenges of our SOBA AMERICA structure and other factors, it is of utmost importance that the Treasurer and Financial Secretary work collaboratively by adopting a mutually agreed process. It should be noted that working collaboratively does not circumvent the need for “checks and balances” in the execution of the role of the financial team. For the above-mentioned process to work efficiently, there needs to be reliable and consistent communication between the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary. Let me put some context in what I am alluding to. For example, the Financial Secretary does not have access to the SOBA AMERICA Bank Accounts, and I am not suggesting that he should. I am just stating a fact. But, what this entails is that the Financial Secretary would always rely on the Treasurer to provide accurate information on income, expenses, bank statement

(to verify deposits and withdrawals). While the Financial Secretary gets information on authorized expenditures by the President, there are other monthly recurring expenses that at times fluctuate and only a bank statement (showing deposits and withdrawals) provided by the Treasurer will help the Financial Secretary keep the records current. Another example is SAGI, with the payment being made by the Treasurer on behalf of SOBA AMERICA and so the Financial Secretary would rely on that information being provided by the Treasurer to keep the records current. The expectation therefore is that the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary would be in constant communication for Collaborative Leadership to work. In the beginning of our tenure, the working relationship and transition was seamless. However, for the last fourteen months, the Mini Convention in Montreal was the first time I spoke to the Treasurer about SOBA AMERICA, although I tried repeatedly to reach the Treasurer to no avail. He was either out of the country or too busy to return my calls. SOBA AMERICA is bigger than any one of us. No individual has the “magic answer” to the solutions of our “problems”. But, together, through Collaborative Leadership, we can move SOBA AMERICA to the next level.

Members’ Frustration With the “Itoe Administration Financial Team”: I know many members have been frustrated with the Financial Team for some time now and many have expressed their frustration publicly and privately. I want to use this opportunity to shed some light on some of my challenges because I think every registered member of SOBA AMERICA deserves an explanation. First and foremost, the frustration on the Financial Team should be directed to no one else in the current administration except to the Treasurer and Financial Secretary. Incompetence is not a word that I have ever been associated with. But, when I hear the complains of some of our fellow SOBA AMERICA brethren on the “lack of transparency” “lack of accountability” and “lackluster performance” of the “Financial Team” of the Itoe Administration, it breaks my heart. It breaks my heart because I know fully well that the complaints are genuine and the current situation is something that could have been avoided by a collaborative working relationship between the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary; being “in constant communication” and showing diligence in getting all financial reports done and published in a timely manner. It also breaks my heart because I would have liked to express my frustration in not being able to “effectively communicate” with the Treasurer for the past fourteen months. But I am not someone who subscribes to confrontation. However, I made sure the President was aware of my frustration, since he is my boss. In most cases, it was the President who would intervene to make sure the financial statements were ready and posted on the website, albeit, not in a timely manner. Sometimes, quarterly statements were posted a day before the convention and I am sure many members did not have the time to review the reports before the convention. An example is the last convention in Boston that I could not attend for family reasons. I had no input on the content of

the Boston Convention report and could not respond to repeated call from members for the report to be posted. My philosophy is to always try to find opportunities in adversity and always believe in giving people the benefit of the doubt. Now, I think if someone has so much going on that he does not have the time or cannot make the time to “work collaboratively”, he should not run for office in SOBA AMERICA.

Collaborative Leadership is the key to the success of Soba America. If Soba America had a structure where the finances are handled only by an individual (CFO for example), then that structure would be best for someone that does not embrace “collaborative leadership.” But our current structure, that implicitly relies on a “collaborative working relationship” between the Treasurer and the Financial Secretary does not work well for leadership style that does not embrace “collaborative leadership”. One of the reasons I am running for Vice President is to support the vision of Dr. Bertrand Fote who has vowed that the shortcomings of our current financial team will be corrected by making sure that the Treasurer and Financial Secretary work collaboratively.

Servant Leadership: In all the leadership experiences I have had, I have always embraced the philosophy of Servant Leadership. In serving, my goal is to promote and participate in those things that will enrich the lives of the people I serve. I have embraced our culture of “being a brother’s keeper” consistently without discrimination; young vs. old, junior vs. senior SOBANS, ethnic background, etc. We have a common heritage that binds us as SOBANS and that is stronger than the things that divide us. As the President of SOBA TRISTATE, I have worked collaboratively with our fellow SOBA TRISTATE brethren to make our chapter very vibrant. We are recognized in the TRISTATE area as one of the most reliable and consistent philanthropic association. We had a very successful fundraising gala last year in which we raised more than \$40,000 of net profit. Currently, we have 25 members in SOBA TRISTATE, all of whom are registered and in good standing for the current 2018-2019 fiscal year. Two of our brethren, myself and Emeritus Quintus Enow, are members of the President Club. Our members have generously pledged or contributed to the SOBA AMERICA BAND PROJECT. All of what our chapter has accomplished is thanks to the dedication of our members and it reflects Collaborative Leadership at its finest.

What SOBA AMERICA Leadership is Not: Beware of people who want to be leaders-first at the national level before serving at the local level. Beware of people who see leadership at the national level as a “check box” in their resume in the quest for visibility. Beware of people that use divisive language to pit SOBANS against SOBANS. The SOBA culture is one that shows respect for every SOBAN irrespective of class and generation. Vote for people that have a record of quality

service at the local level and are ready to transition to the “big stage” at the national level. SOBA AMERICA leadership is not about friendship, and personal affiliations. SOBA AMERICA leadership is about competence, history of accomplishments and vision. I know my fellow SOBA AMERICA brethren are smart and will not be fooled by the complacency of blind personal affiliations and friendships.

Who is Felix Ngassa:

- SOBAN # 3447 of the 1983 Class.
- ASP 1987/88; SP 1989/90.
- Treasurer SOBA UNIYAO, 1993 (Felix Nkongho Agbor Balla was President).
- President SOBA UNIYAO, 1994.
- Master of Chemistry and Physics, Sasse College, 1995-1997.
- President SOBA TRISTATE.
- National Financial Secretary SOBA AMERICA.
- Chairman SOBA AMERICA Editorial Board.
- Candidate for Vice President of SOBA AMERICA

Thank you for your support as I look forward to continue working with you as the next Vice President of SOBA AMERICA.