

## **UPF Nigeria Special Interreligious Assembly to Mark UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2014**

By Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, Secretary General, UPF Nigeria

**Peace Embassy, Abuja, Nigeria:** The UPF Nigeria convened a Special Interreligious Assembly to Mark World Interfaith Harmony Week 2014 at the Peace Embassy in Abuja and deliberated on innovative approaches toward promoting interreligious harmony for national unification of Nigeria. The event brought together Islamic and Christian religious educators, leaders and organizations to reflect on the interreligious relations challenges that Nigeria has been facing and what needs to be done to create the much needed culture, structure and infrastructure for interreligious cooperation and harmony.

Participants were welcomed by Dr. George C. Ikpot, a Trustee of the UPF Nigeria who also serves as Director, UPF Nigeria Office of United Nations/ECOWAS/National Assembly Relations. He introduced the participants to the significance of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and the theme of “Love of God and Love of Neighbour” as well as explained that the UPF Founders perspective on Faith in God and Unity of Humankind. In his words, “our nation needs to establish a national level faith in God and also promote unity among all citizens. This is the simple lesson that we need in moving our nation forward and this week provides us an opportunity to show our common love for God and for fellow citizens”.

Speaking on innovative approaches to the promotion of interreligious harmony for national unification, Dr Raphael Ogar Oko, UPF Nigeria Secretary General shared the UPF Principles for Peace and emphasized the principle of ‘we are one human family under God’ as well as the principle of ‘interreligious and international cooperation as essential for world peace’ as great teachings of Founder Sun Myung Moon. “Our nation can become one of the best in the world if religious and political leaders can seriously take time to study and practice the teachings of the UPF Founders. Their thoughts offer very great explanation for the significance of the World Interfaith Harmony week”.

The event also featured a special presentation on the need for interreligious harmony and cooperation for the realization of national unification of Nigeria. Dr. Raphael Oko proposed the need for a culture of interreligious harmony outlining the steps to include formulating an interreligious code of conduct for all citizens, the introduction of interreligious education in schools as well as consideration of interreligious content in the new constitution of the nation. It was also suggested and endorsed by all participants that the National Assembly of Nigeria and the Federal Government should work toward the creation of the National Assembly Committee on Interreligious Affairs and the Federal Ministry for Interreligious Affairs as government structures for promoting interreligious cooperation.

On the development of infrastructure for interreligious harmony, the Secretary General recommended the need for a National Interreligious Worship Centre that will be open to all religious groups in the country for utilization beyond the present government funded National Christian Centre and National Mosque building in Abuja, the country’s capital. “We do not have more than one Creator, despite our different faith traditions. We need a common place, a common God’s House like the Government House, that all religious people in our country can come into freely to discuss our similarities and our differences. Through such facilities, we can understand each other well and grow beyond a focus on what divides us”.

Responding to the presentation, participants commended the UPF for her inspiring vision for interreligious harmony, national unification and global peace. A traditional ruler and an Ambassador for Peace, Alhaji Dalhatu Abubakar Lawal, and the Dallatun Kaura Katsina said, “Nigeria is one irrespective of tribe or religion. What we should look out for is ensuring that all of us, both youths and leaders earn

what we work for instead of dwelling on issues of state of origin or religion”. Participants commended President Goodluck Jonathan for the recent legal ban on same sex marriage and called on all Nigerians as well as the international community to support this decision of the Nigerian government. A voice vote was taken after the question on ban on same sex marriage. “Those who support the Nigerian government ban on same sex marriage in Nigeria say yes” and everyone echoed yes. Those who are opposed to the ban should please say no, and no one said no. It was unanimously resolved that participants at UN Interfaith Harmony Week endorsed the idea of ban on same sex marriage in Nigeria as it is not a religious tradition to practice such.

Four Nigerians, two Muslims and two Christians were presented with the UPF Ambassadors for Peace award for their work and determination to promote interreligious harmony in Nigeria. The event ended with the endorsement of support for the campaign for national unification 2014 and pledge to become “global interreligious citizens in Nigeria”. The event was covered by media representatives from News Agency of Nigeria, Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, Nigeria Television Authority and other local newspapers.

Some online media reports:

People’s daily newspaper: <http://www.peoplesdailyng.com/exploiting-pragmatic-measures-for-peace-in-nigeria/>