

## The launch of Interreligious Association for Peace and Development in Nigeria

George M. Ogurie  
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Total participants: 180 – including 65 religious leaders representing Christianity, Islam, African traditional religion and some other groups such as the Hare Krishna Movement and Eckankar; civil society representatives – 28; higher educational institutions officials – 13; government functionaries – 7; media representatives – 15; our members – 62.

September 18 is reminiscent of True Parents' victory at the Washington Monument Rally in 1976. The significance of that victory was the breaking down of barriers in the spiritual world among the different religions. It was therefore fitting that it should be a day that we launch the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) in Nigeria as one of the ways initiated by our True Mother to translate that spiritual victory into substance.



The Chairman of the occasion was Distinguished Senator Ibrahim N. Mantu, CFR, who is also the Chairman of UPF Nigeria and a former Deputy Senate President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN (the umbrella body of Christians in Nigeria) was represented by, Rev. Dr. Peter Ogunmuyiwa. The National Mosque Abuja was represented by Alhaji Dawud Amuta. Rev. Fr Robert Achiaga represented the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja. Mrs. Ruth Ogwu, a Director at the National Orientation Agency represented the Agency while the State House was represented by Mr. Mustapha Mohammed El-Amin. The National Council of Women Societies was represented by Mrs. Edna Azura.



Participants such as Bishop Kleham K. Degaya, General Overseer of HolyGhostant Chapel World-Wide, Owerri; Rev. Dr. E. J. Udo, head of Centre for Deep Dialogue and Critical Thinking of the University of Uyo; Professor Imeyen Noah of the Department of Modern Languages University of Calabar; Rev. Dr. J. Ola Ojo of the Nigerian Baptist Convention Baptist College of Theology, Lagos; Rev. Father Marcellinus Yese and a big delegation who came from Benue State; and many others, all came from far ends of the country. The Peace Corp of Nigeria sent a big delegation headed by the Deputy National Commandant Dr. Edet Ekpenyong. The level of participation was high.

Opening prayers were offered by leaders representing Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Islam, Hare Krishna, Eckankar and Ifa (African Traditional) Religion.

In a welcoming address, Dr. George C. Ikpot, Secretary General of PWPA Nigeria, reminded participants that they came to the event as representatives of people at the grassroots. And that they are the ones the nation is looking up to for the realization of peace.

In his own opening remark, chairman of the occasion, Senator Mantu, shared that he had a deep feeling of oneness during the opening prayers offered by the religious leaders. Although they were coming from different directions, they were pointing to the same God, he said. He used the occasion to call on leaders of the nation to become "born-again" to bring about positive changes in our nation and hence realize peace and development.

His Eminence, Cardinal John Onayiekan of the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja, who was unavoidably absent, sent a goodwill message which was read by Rev. Fr Robert Achiaga. Cardinal Onayiekan stated that "Christianity and Islam both share a heavy responsibility to shed the burden of a history of rivalries with its bitter fruit of holy wars which should put all of us to shame." But that this has been the negative effects of the manipulation of religion for political and other interests, he said.

Introductory videos on UPF and True Parents' vision for world peace through interfaith relations and joint actions were shown. A song, Peace-Shalom-Salaam-alekun, was led by Sister C. T. Essien to prepare the atmosphere for the keynote address presented by Rev. George M. Ogurie, National Leader, FFWPU Nigeria.

In the keynote address, Rev. Ogurie testified to the profound education we have received from our True

Parents, which has helped us come out of our religious boxes in order that we may become global or universal citizens. This way, we are truly liberated members of our various religious communities. IAPD is therefore a platform for shared action by "liberated men and women" to address real issues in communities for the realization of peace and development.

Representatives of the various religions came forward afterwards for the "Water Merging Ceremony," during which they all poured cups of water into a single bowl symbolizing the merger of all the religions to their original source as with the flow of all rivers into the ocean.



The event was an opportunity to introduce the book "World Scriptures and the Teachings of Sun Myung Moon" to religious leaders, scholars and representatives of educational institutions as a teaching material to enlighten members of their communities in a multi-religious society such as ours and to foster better understanding and peace.

Several speakers representing their various communities praised our True Parents for establishing IAPD and especially for producing the World Scriptures which they promised to put to good use.

Two new inductees received Ambassadors for Peace certificates from UPF chairman.

At the end, Master of Ceremony Dr. Raphael Oko called on Bishop Dauda Aaron of the Great Nation Assembly, Masaka, to read out the Resolution for the Establishment of Interreligious Association for Peace and Development IAPD in Nigeria. All participants signed the Resolution, both on paper and on a display canvass.

Refreshments were served and afterwards everyone proceeded to join in the Peace Road march scheduled for that day.

The event was well covered by the Nigerian Television Authority and Radio Nigeria (both network and Kapital FM).

With thanks to UPF Nigeria staff and all who contributed to making the event a success.