

UPF-Nigeria's Parliamentarians for Peace National Conference in Abuja

Raphael Ogar Oko
June 6, 2016



Abuja, Nigeria -- UPF-Nigeria convened a special Parliamentarians for Peace National Conference in the National Assembly Complex in Abuja, the capital.

The conference, held on June 6, 2016, was a follow-up to the launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) held during the International Leadership Conference in February 2016 in Seoul, South Korea.

Participants included Ambassadors for Peace from across Nigeria with some senators, members of the House of Representatives and honorable members from State Houses of Assembly. Hosted by the distinguished Sen. Mohammed Shaaba Lafiagi, the chair of the Senate Committee on Security and National Intelligence, the theme dealt with “Achieving Sustainable Peace and Development in Nigeria: The Role of Parliamentarians, Governments, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations.” The conference examined the role of key stakeholders in promoting interreligious relations, marriage and family strengthening, as well as effective resources utilization and development.



A select group of high-level delegates from across Nigeria and international participants were in attendance, including UPF Regional Chair for West Africa Mrs. Katherine Rigney, Special Envoy to Nigeria Rev. Sang Park, UPF-Nigeria Special Advisor Evelyne Winter, and the Nigerian Ambassadors for Peace in Diaspora Initiative, along with religious and civil society leaders.

The distinguished members of Parliament and former parliamentarians who attended the conference had an opportunity in a special session to propose the need for the formal launching of Nigeria’s chapter of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP).

The opening session featured an invocation, the Nigerian National Anthem, as well as introduction and recognition of participants by the program anchor, Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, secretary general, UPF-Nigeria. Dr. George C. Ikpot, director, UPF-Nigeria Office of International Affairs, gave warm opening remarks in which he especially thanked Senator Lafiagi for hosting the conference and facilitating the use of the National Assembly complex. Dr. Ikpot also recognized Mrs. Katherine Rigney for honoring us with her esteemed presence at the conference despite her very busy schedule. He welcomed all the delegates from state and national assemblies, Nigerian Ambassadors for Peace in Diaspora, distinguished participants and local leaders.



The conference host, Senator Mohammed Shaaba Lafiagi, expressed his delight in welcoming all the participants on behalf of the National Assembly of Nigeria to the very historic gathering. “As you are aware, this gathering is the inaugural meeting of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace in Nigeria, which is a follow-up to the International Leadership Conference held in Seoul, South Korea, in February 2016. I was one of the few delegates from Nigeria who attended that very inspiring conference. It was an amazing experience for me to see the extraordinary leadership of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, wife of the late UPF Founder. By her exemplary demonstration of true love, care for the several thousand participants and the many activities we attended, I am truly convinced that the world has entered the Era of Woman,” he said. Furthermore, he stated, “The program today will provide us the opportunity to examine together some of the critical challenges facing our nation, including: building interreligious relations, strengthening marriages and families, as well as other topics such as interethnic rivalry, anti-corruption and diversification of the economy, and peace and security. These are issues that we are facing as a nation, and I wish to thank the Universal Peace Federation for making it possible for us to give serious attention to these matters.”

The opening session was chaired by Ambassador Sir Dan Okekenta, one of the members of the Nigerian delegation to the International Leadership Conference in Seoul in February 2016. In his opening remarks, he said,

”I believe it is very significant that we have gathered here for this special and commendable initiative of the Universal Peace Federation, an international NGO dedicated to the building of a world of peace that each of us yearns for every day in our hearts and in our prayers. As one of the Nigerian delegates to the UPF International Leadership Conference in Seoul, South Korea, in February 2016, I have no doubt about the credibility of this organization and the commitment of the Founders and leaders to inspire people around the world to live in peace. I am encouraged that through the support and leadership of my dear brother, the distinguished Senator Shaaba Lafiagi, parliamentarians and peace ambassadors as well as other stakeholders have come together from across Nigeria to attend this conference and to deliberate on contemporary challenges facing our nation and the world. Thank you for coming despite your busy schedules. Being aware that our nation’s population of about 180 million citizens is spread across every nation of the world, I think that this should convey the importance of our nation and our responsibility in the continent. I believe that Nigeria should lead the way in establishing the UPF Founders’ vision of one universal family under God, especially in Africa. Our purpose for gathering today is to help our nation rediscover the path of peace and sustainable development that we all need to take at this critical and challenging time in our nation’s history.”

The message by UPF International President Dr. Thomas Walsh was presented by Her Excellency Hajiya Aisha Emeje Audu, wife of the former governor of Kogi State. The UPF International president said he was “very pleased to take this opportunity to congratulate UPF-Nigeria for convening a conference at the National Assembly on June 6, 2016, to propose the formation of the Nigerian chapter of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace. It is laudable that national and state assemblymen, along with UPF Ambassadors for Peace, are coming together in a collaborative effort to promote best practices toward achieving peace and harmony in your nation.”



He further explained that “the Universal Peace Federation advocates broad-based and innovative approaches to peace. Nigeria, as it is home to many of the major world religions as well as different expressions of indigenous cultures, can become an example of harmony. Through the development of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace, Nigerian legislators and Ambassadors for Peace will be able to partner with UPF for the sake of peacebuilding and human development, and to leverage the strengths and resources required for peace and development.”

He concluded, “Recognizing the enormity of this complex work, I wholeheartedly commend the work of the parliamentarians and Ambassadors for Peace in Nigeria, and extend my appreciation for your commitment to work for a safe, secure, stable and peaceful nation. May this conference be the beginning step for a new paradigm which can surmount the challenges and serious threats to human development and the realization of peace that our world is facing at this time.”

The guest speaker was Chief Mike Ozekhome, a human rights lawyer and senior advocate of Nigeria. He spoke on the need to take seriously the contemporary challenges facing the nation and the world and urged participants to be open-minded to the ideas that will be shared at the conference. He called on parliamentarians and Ambassadors for Peace to work together to address issues of interreligious relations, ethnic rivalry and the gross abuse and misuse of public resources in Nigeria.

The keynote address of UPF Co-Founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon was delivered by Mrs. Katherine Rigney. Some excerpts of the speech follow:

“My husband and I have dedicated our lives exclusively to building a world of lasting peace. This has been our lifelong, God-centered mission. We have always taught that peace is not merely an absence of violent conflict. Peace comes into being whenever relationships are characterized by harmony, balance and mutual respect. Such relationships are created when we practice unselfishness and living for the sake of others. This is the essence of true love. True love is the essence of God, who created all things as our Heavenly Parent. We all have a nature that derives from our common origin, that is, we are beings capable of practicing true love, toward one another and toward all things in the world around us.

“My husband and I have applied this ideal, and the principle of living for the sake of others, in every sector of society, including the spheres of government, religion, civil society, the private sector, academia, the arts, and even at the level of global governance. We have always honored individuals who applied these principles in their spheres of professional life, appointing them as Ambassadors for Peace. Many parliamentarians around the world have been appointed as Ambassadors for Peace, and they work closely with UPF and other affiliated organizations of our movement.

“In the year 2000, my husband and I spoke at the United Nations in New York, calling on the UN and the member states to consider an innovative proposal, namely, that the United Nations build within its system

an interfaith council, consisting of religious, spiritual and moral leaders who could advise, collaborate and deliberate with representatives of the member states. Such a council could serve as the voice of universal values and principles. More importantly, we always wanted the UN to be centered on God, our Heavenly Parent.



“I gave this same message recently when I spoke at the United Nations in Vienna in May of last year. In other words, no matter what our field of endeavor -- priest, parliamentarian, or professor -- we should be committed to and guided by universal moral and spiritual principles. Whether we are the mayor of a small town, the pastor of a small church, the president of a nation or the secretary-general of the UN, this is our eternal responsibility. This is the responsibility of each parliamentarian gathered here.

“In closing, I want to emphasize the importance of the role of parliamentarians. You represent the people. You are entrusted by the people with a great responsibility. At the same time, your responsibility is to God, our Heavenly Parent. If parliamentarians of the world join together in harmony and cooperation for the sake of peace, we can transform the current reality of our world, creating a world of joy, harmony and lasting peace. With this in mind I encourage you, on this day, to form an international association of parliamentarians dedicated to peace, centered on the principle of living for the sake of others, and centered on God, our Heavenly Parent. You are the representatives of the 7 billion people of the world. If you join together in this way, there is nothing we cannot accomplish. Let us work together to build a world of lasting peace.”

Goodwill messages were offered by Hon. Lynda Ikpeazu of the House of Representatives and Sen. Christine Olujimi and some of the Ambassadors for Peace.

Rev. George Ogurie, the national president of FFWPU-Nigeria, an affiliated organization, made a special presentation about the Peace Road 2016 project and announced the formal launch of the project on June 7, 2016. Participants signed the resolution in support of the formation of the Nigerian Chapter of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace and agreed that a formal launch of the chapter be held after the regional launch for West Africa. Ten new VIPs were awarded the Ambassadors for Peace certificate.

After the lunch break, the conference plenary sessions focused on Strengthening Interreligious Relations, Marriage/Family Affairs, Interethnic Relations, Anti-Corruption, Diversification of the Economy for Sustainable Development, and Peace and Security.

At the closing session of the conference, participants considered and made the following recommendations:

1. UPF-Nigeria be commended for initiating the Parliamentarians for Peace National Conference in Abuja and special thanks be conveyed to the Founders of UPF and the international leadership of the organization for their global work for peace.
2. There is the need to endorse the proposal for the formation and formal launch of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace and the Nigeria chapter.
3. Promotion of interreligious harmony

1. Creation of an interreligious affairs committee at the national and state assemblies to provide legislative support for interreligious activities.
 2. Creation of a ministry for interreligious affairs by the federal and state governments.
 3. Introduction of interreligious studies in educational institutions by federal and state ministries of education and the creation of a department of interreligious education at the federal and state ministries of education.
 4. Strengthening and renewal of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC).
 5. Designation of National Interreligious Day and commemoration of an Interreligious Day celebration during the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.
 6. Appointment of special advisers and assistants to political leaders on interreligious affairs.
4. Marriage/family affairs and interethnic relations issues
1. The establishment of the national directorate of marriage and family affairs.
 2. National and state assemblies' committee on marriage and family affairs.
 3. Renewal of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) plan and inclusion of interstate, interethnic marriage options for NYSC members.
 4. Replacement of state of origin with place of residence.
 5. Endorsement of the UPF marriage and family peace blessing program as a tool for promoting national unity and integration.
5. Anti-corruption and diversification of the economy
1. Strengthening of anti-corruption institutions.
 2. Review of political parties' policies that facilitate huge personal investment in seeking for public positions.
 3. Legislative support for the conduct of corruption risk analysis on public policies.
 4. Diversification of the education system to support and facilitate diversification of the economy.
 5. Consideration for establishment of zonal development commissions in the North East, North Central, North West, South East, South West, and South South, in addition to the Niger Delta Development Commission
 6. Facilitate the advancement of national policies to move the nation beyond dependence on oil into areas like ICT (information and communications technology), solar energy resources, solid minerals and agriculture.
6. Peace and security
1. Adoption of track II diplomacy in peacemaking programs.
 2. Strengthening of institutions for peacebuilding and national security including the establishment of a National Peace College.
 3. The development of a national database of all citizens and residents in Nigeria.
 4. Promotion of a parental policing policy.
 5. Reduction of weapons in circulation and utilization of dialogue for reconciliation.

The conference ended with a presentation of certificates to all participants and a group photograph.