

UPF-Nigeria promotes interreligious harmony - program for religious leaders

Raphael Ogar Oko

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Abuja, Nigeria—UPF-Nigeria launched a campaign to promote interreligious harmony with a program for religious leaders and organizations.

As a follow-up to the commemoration of World Interfaith Harmony Week during the first week of February, UPF-Nigeria held a meeting on March 5, 2017, at the Christ Evangelical and Prayer Ministries in the Lugbe section of Abuja.

In response to recent incidents of hate speech by some religious educators and leaders in Nigeria, UPF organized this campaign, which has as its motto “Forgive, Love and Unite.”

The more than 100 participants included Ambassadors for Peace, members of the clergy, UPF-Nigeria staff and members of the Christ Evangelical and Prayer Ministries in Lugbe.

Speaking at the event, UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko explained the motivation for the campaign, which is a response to the increasing cases of hate speech expressed by Nigerians on the basis of religious affiliations.

“We need to realize that all religions have a common intention, which is the well-being of humanity,” Dr. Oko said. “Unfortunately, there are conflicts in the expressions of religions due to the background of the pioneers, the environment and even the age the religion emerged. We need to focus on the intention and

overcome the differences in expression. Fundamentally, all religions teach love, forgiveness, unity and service to others above self. This is what we need to focus on, if our nation must move forward. We are now living in an interreligious era in which our progress as a nation will not be determined by competition and hatred among religious groups but on the cooperation of all religious persons and groups.”

The central message was drawn from the UPF International website:

This age of globalization needs enlightened leaders in each faith who can examine their sacred writings and traditions and identify the aspects that can benefit all humanity as well as those that preserve each religion's identity. UPF calls on people of faith to honor the Divine indwelling in a way that encourages understanding, respect, and cooperation among people of all faiths for the well-being of our communities and peace in the world.

Goodwill messages were delivered by Her Excellency, Mrs. Aisha Emeje Audu, wife of the former governor of Kogi State; Usman Alfa, the Shettima of Lapai in Niger State, who represented the former head of state of Nigeria, Rtd. Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar; and Bishop Wilson Elimiaga.

The religious orientation campaign is meant to complement the activities of the National Orientation Agency. That Nigerian government agency seeks to promote patriotism among the citizens on the basis of state of origin or place of residence, while the religious orientation campaign is designed to inspire religious groups and persons to love their nation as they aspire to love the Creator.

The campaign also featured the commissioning of Rev. Felix Johnson Osakwe as Ambassador for Peace and champion of the "Forgive, Love and Unite" campaign. In his response to the recognition, Rev. Osakwe promised to be actively involved in the activities of UPF and to mobilize other religious leaders to embrace the campaign and help in building a united Nigeria.

The interreligious orientation campaign to forgive, love and unite will be carried to several religious groups and leaders in Nigeria and will promote universal interreligious values. The official photograph of the UPF founders was presented to Rev. Felix Johnson Osakwe in the presence of his congregation and other well-wishers who attended the event as the persons called by God who are inspiring the campaign to forgive, love and unite.

The event was reported throughout the country on the network news of the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria and the Nigerian Television Authority.