

## UPF Benue State, Nigeria commemorates the 2018 UN International Day of Peace

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Benue State, Nigeria -- As part of activities to commemorate the 2018 UN International Day of Peace, UPF-Nigeria in collaboration with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) and the Christian Association of Nigeria organized Marriage/Family Peace Blessing Festivals. Attending were 876 couples, who pledged to become exemplary peaceful couples who will strive to establish peaceful families as foundation for the realization of peaceful communities, states, nations and the world..

The festivals were held between September 20 and 23, 2018, in the Adi, Zaki Biam and Buruku communities in Benue State. This state in north central Nigeria has faced severe violence in the recent past. The family peace festival was a desire fulfilled as most members of the community could gather together again to learn about peace and make individual and collective commitments to living in peace.

On September 20, the festival was held in Adi community and had 68 couples as participants in the World Peace Blessing. Over 200 people gathered to participate in the activities to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace in the community. The Adi peace festival featured a World Peace Blessing and a Peace Road procession around the community by motorcyclists, married men and women, youth leaders and faith-based leaders of the Adi community including the chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria (Buruku chapter), Bishop Isaiah Eglenu Lina and several Christian leaders in the community. After the Peace Road procession around the community with songs of peace and praise, the participants gathered at the community church hall, where they were addressed on the purpose of the Peace Road Initiative and the UN International Day of Peace by UPF Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Oko and FFWPU Nigeria national director of education, Rev. Imo Nkanta. After the speeches and an interactive session, couples who were registered for the World Peace Blessing stayed for more lectures and the ceremony.

The lectures focused on the meaning of the blessing festival as well as the UPF peace principles and the four great realms of heart. At the end of the interactive session on the blessing, 68 couples participated in the ceremony. Participants expressed their gratitude to the founders of the UPF and for the members supporting the peace festival activities.

On September 21, 2018, the blessing festival team moved to another community where community leaders were registering couples for the program. We arrived at Zaki Biam and had the festival lectures and ceremonies at the First Baptist Church. We were welcomed by the chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria in the area, who was with the divisional police officer who also provided police officers who served as security men at the event. After delivering the lectures on the significance of the UN International Day of Peace and the Marriage/Family Peace Blessing Festival, 112 couples fully participated in the blessing program. The majority of them were church and community leaders who also offered to extend the program to their churches and communities. The divisional police officer, the traditional ruler of the community and some Christian ministers were presented certificates as

Ambassadors for Peace. They were all full of praise for the initiative and pledge to host a bigger event on October 4, 2018. Twelve volunteers offered to register more couples to ensure that the Zaki Biam community has 430 couples to form the foundation for a "peace tribe" in the area.

The festival team proceeded to the next community of Buruku. In Buruku, the couples gathered at the NKST church; many traveled across the Buruku river to attend the festival. After hearing about the UN International Day of Peace and the Marriage/Family Peace Blessing Festival, 501 couples participated in the blessing program. The hall was filled, and over 100 couples had to participate in the blessing under a mango tree close to the hall. Volunteers moved from house to house to mobilize couples to register for the event. The couples were so excited as they arrived at the venue and were welcomed by staff.



After the lectures, couples renewed their commitment to each other and to raise up their children to become peaceful citizens. At the end of the program, light refreshments were served to all participants and couples were grouped together in teams of 36 couples to work together toward a peaceful community.

Following the large turnout in Buruku, volunteers offered to reach out and mobilize more couples in their neighboring community to ensure that at least 860 couples would participate in the festival to create two peace tribes of 430 couples.

On Sunday, September 23, the peace festival team returned to the Adi community again. As soon as we arrived in the community, volunteers began mobilizing the couples that they pre-registered to the venue of the program. As each couple arrived at the venue, a festival scarf was provided to them, their participation form was numbered and they moved on for a photo session and were then taken to the hall for a seat. At our return to the community of Adi, 196 couples registered and participated in the blessing program.

The news of the World Peace Blessing program is spreading like wildfire. More volunteers are coming forward to mobilize couples in their areas to participate in the festival, which they are fast realizing as the solution to the many challenges they have been facing. Religious and community leaders are reaching out to each other, sharing positive testimonies of the family peace festivals and encouraging others to welcome the UPF/FFWPU team to their communities.

In each of the areas that we visited, chairmen of the Christian Association of Nigeria and their spouses in Buruku, Logo and Katsina Ala who have participated in a similar blessing program with their church members between May and August 2018 are fully supporting the program with their presence at each event and sharing testimonies of their experiences as participants and encouraging others to embrace the program. There are increasing requests every day now to extend the family peace festival to other communities in Benue State as well as to other neighboring states.

The interest shown by participating couples, religious and community leaders testifies to the point that we can bring about a peaceful world by strengthening marriages and building strong families through the family peace festival education programs and ceremonies in local communities. Volunteers in various communities are ready to work with us to bless hundreds of thousands of couples throughout the region and the nation.