

Liberian Ambassador to US Hosts Peace Gathering

Gail Paine and Tomiko Duggan

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Washington, DC, USA - "Be at home!" was H.E. Ambassador Nathaniel Barnes' greeting as each guest entered the ambassadorial residence as the sun set on September 23. With his wife, Dawn Barnes, at his side, Ambassador Barnes proceeded to host this special gathering of peacemakers and friends of Liberia, commemorating the UN International Day of Peace.



The Universal Peace Federation (UPF) International, partnering with UPF-USA and the Embassy of Liberia, presented a moving program entitled, "Building a Culture of Peace in the 21st Century" which will remain in many guests' memory as an evening of light and hope for humanity.

Amidst the African artwork and furniture of the Ambassador's residence, over 80 guests joined in the spirit of the evening program. The guests dined on a delicious selection of ethnic foods especially prepared by Mrs. Barnes for the event. Old friends were greeted and new acquaintances made. As the program progressed, everyone was so at ease that they felt as if they truly were "at home."

Ambassador Barnes had been in New York earlier in the day for the annual opening meeting of the UN General Assembly. He was unexpectedly called by his nation's leader, President Sirleaf Johnson, who was invited to lunch by President Barack Obama. Ambassador Barnes fulfilled his responsibilities in New York and rushed to return by train to Washington, DC, to honor his prior commitment to act as host of for the Day of Peace program. After only four hours at home, he returned to New York on a late evening train to continue his responsibilities there.



A sense of Ambassador Barnes' personal integrity and leadership permeated the evening's atmosphere from the time he gave his inspirational opening remarks. He called the audience to a higher understanding of our common humanity.



"When the American people go to the polls," he said, "they need to be serious, and understand that we are in the age of a global community. The actions of America affect the world, and I tell you, the pain of a mother in a countryside village of Liberia losing her daughter is the same as the pain of a father looking for his son's remains at ground zero after 9/11. That pain is the same. We are more similar than we are different and it is time we all acknowledged our common humanity."

Tomiko Duggan, Director of the UPF Office of Embassy Relations in Washington, DC, served as master of ceremonies throughout the evening.

David Smith, Deputy Director of the Washington, DC office of the UN Information Center, greeted the audience and delivered the Secretary-General's remarks for the International Day of Peace 2009 with his added commentary.

Sir James Mancham, the founding President of the Republic of Seychelles and the current Chairman of the UPF's Global Peace Council, was the keynote speaker. With an international reputation as an advocate for reconciliation and peacemaking, Sir James provided his perspective on the quest for peace in our world — emphasizing the need for leaders who are capable of statesmanship to replace those who are merely politicians. He also stressed the need

for all who are striving to improve the world to seek an inner peace which will be naturally reflected in one's endeavors.



The day before, Sir James did an interview with Voice of America television. Grover Norquist also hosted him at his home for a question and answer session and book signing. Sir James spoke about US foreign policy and the strategic importance of the Seychelles islands in the Indian Ocean.

Sir James is traveling with a global book-signing tour for his autobiography, *Seychelles Global Citizen*, and fortunately was in Washington DC and available for the program. Until the very end of the evening, many guests used the opportunity to introduce themselves to Sir James, engage him in conversation, and get his autograph on the book.

The Nigerian opera singer, Abiodun Koya, gave a moving rendition of "Amazing Grace."

After an introductory video about the UPF, Mr. Jim Flynn, Secretary General of UPF-USA, presented the principles of peacebuilding and reconciliation which are the central pillars of UPF's efforts to establish peace throughout the world. He identified five basic principles as the common ground of the world's religions and cultures.

At the close of the program, new Ambassadors for Peace were appointed and welcomed to UPF's global network of peacemakers by the Washington area Secretary General, Gail Paine. First to be appointed were the host and hostess, Ambassador Nathaniel and Dawn Barnes.

At the end of the evening, this gathering of guests from different nations, cultures, religions, and races chatted energetically with new friends as they slowly left the residence. There was an awareness of how this International Day of Peace program sponsored by the Liberian Embassy and UPF made its own contribution to the world of peace that is the hope of everyone who attended.



Gail Paine and Tomiko Duggan contributed to this report.