

Sun Myung Moon and Nigeria's New Hope for Peace

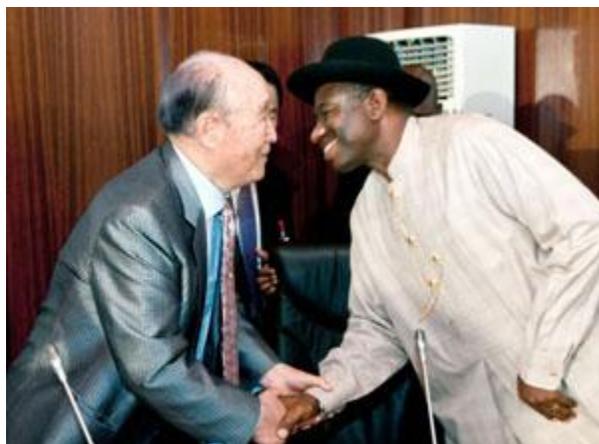
Thomas Walsh
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UPF - International

Abuja, Nigeria - The International Conference Center in Abuja, Nigeria, has hosted many prestigious events in the twenty years since the new federal capital was founded in 1991, but the eleventh stop on the UPF Founder's Peace Tour 2011 on July 17 was surely one of the most memorable.

A crowd of around 3,000, including more than 700 from overseas, was on hand to hear the UPF Founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon speak at length of God's hope that Nigeria will become a model nation of peace and a beacon of light to all of Africa.



Africa's most populous nation is surely in need of a new vision, and many challenges face President Goodluck Jonathan, who after the recent elections is currently negotiating the difficult task of assembling a cabinet and government that can embrace all Nigeria's cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity.



Father Moon shares a warm greeting with Nigerian President, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.



Leaders of six faiths offer prayers of peace to open the Peace Tour program in Abuja.

That work has been made even more difficult by both human and natural disasters, including a recent outbreak of terrorist bombing in Abuja and the North, and widespread flooding in Lagos, the former capital and biggest city.

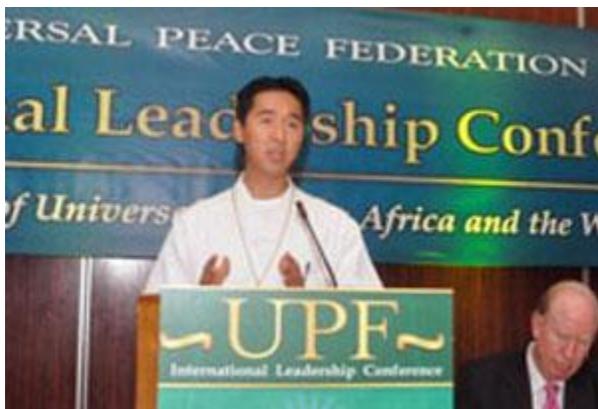
Despite all this turmoil, President Jonathan had earlier taken scarce time away from his other duties to for a substantive meeting with Father and Mother Moon and members of their family and tour party. During this time together, Dr. Moon offered the President three suggestions for the future of Nigeria.

First, he strongly urged President Jonathan to honor God and God's laws and traditions at the center of his government, and to channel Nigeria's national passion for religion into an asset for peace instead of a source of division.

Next, he emphasized the importance of supporting strong marriages and families, so that Nigeria's family tradition are not eroded by a tide of secular and humanistic values threatening to sweep the country. Finally, he voiced the hope that Nigeria emerge as a model nation for all of Africa, and for the world.

These three themes formed the focus of a three-day International Leadership Conference hosted by the Universal Peace Federation, drawing more than 700 participants from Nigeria and 69 other nations. A total of 34 speakers addressed topics such as agriculture and food; health and development; interfaith peacebuilding; and good governance.

At the opening plenary, Dr. Thomas Walsh, UPF President, said that the leadership conference and the peace tour demonstrated the "commitment of UPF in Nigeria and in Africa at large to promote interfaith cooperation, good governance, strong marriage and family, and character education for youth."



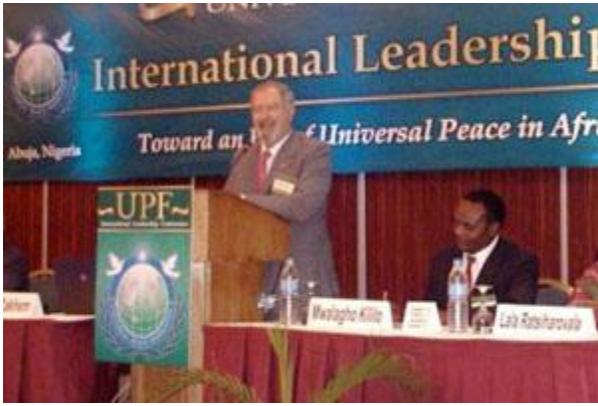
UPF International Chairman Rev. Hyung Jin Moon delivers the conference keynote address.



Former Prime Minister of Togo, Gabriel Messan Kodjo, addresses the Opening Plenary.



The Hon. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Prime Minister from 2009 to 2011, speaks of Nepal's quest for peace.



H.E. Sam Zakhem, former US Ambassador to Bahrain, assesses recent changes in the Middle East.

Dr. Hyung Jin Moon, UPF International Chairman, said that true and lasting peace cannot come from a secular, human origin. “Lasting solutions to the critical problems faced by the people of this region call for a spiritual awakening and the full participation of those who affirm and practice spiritual principles,” he said.

Yet religious passion alone is not enough, he concluded. “As religious leaders or believers, we must be ever vigilant in preventing the corruption of religion that can lead to narrow fanaticism and even violence.”

These realities were clearly acknowledged by the Hon. Ibrahim Nasiru Mantu, Former Deputy President of the Nigerian Senate, in his welcoming remarks. “Nigeria was once a home of peace,” said Mantu. “But today, leaders engage in corrupt practices because they don’t have the fear of God in them. That is why the fundamental teachings of Father Moon are so important, both for Nigeria and the world.”

The depth of Nigeria’s religious commitment could be seen by the way the busy streets of its capital still fall quiet on Sunday, and the stores are all closed. Throughout the afternoon, a good-natured crowd made its way into the Convention Center for the Peace Tour program.

The Universal Peace Orchestra, who had traveled many hundreds of miles from the city of Port Harcourt in the South, offered a stirring rendition of the Nigerian national anthem, and religious leaders of five faiths offered invocations and prayers for peace.



Nigerians line up for tickets to the main program.



Welcome from the Hon. Ibrahim Nasiru Mantu



Ms. Patty Boulaye (l) and others welcome the UPF founders to the stage.



Rev. In Jin Moon

More sounds of praise came from the band Sonic Cult from the United States, and Ms. Patti Boulaye, a Nigerian who left her country as a victim of Nigeria's bitter civil war and went on to become a well known entertainer in Britain, sang "Amazing Grace."

At last, Father and Mother Moon came to the stage, introduced by two of their children, Rev. In Jin Moon, the Senior Pastor of the Unification Church of America, and Rev. Hyung Jin Moon.

"I have felt very welcome here in Nigeria," Father Moon said before beginning to read his peace message. "This country has a great potential, not just for itself but for all of Africa and the world." Yet, he went on to explain, the real resources of a nation are not external things such as oil, minerals, and water. Even Nigeria's vast human resources—one in four Africans is a Nigerian—have little meaning if not centered on God. "What use is even a Nobel prize," he continued, "if it is not used for the sake of peace?"



Father Moon describes a vision of peace for Nigeria based on stable families that love God.

"The tradition of peace that God wants to see in Africa must be firmly established in the family," he said. "Every family must establish a pure tradition. Then, even if the family's fortunes go up and down, even as far as the sun falling below the horizon, eventually the light will return."

As the evening hours advanced and the large international audience sat patiently, Father Moon set aside his prepared text again and again to elaborate on the direction that Nigeria and Africa should take. “To attend God, and to enjoy life with God, you have to understand the path I have taken and walk the same way with me,” he said. “If all the countries of Africa can unite, then this continent will rise.”

Despite the lateness of the hour, most in the audience were genuinely enthusiastic about the message they had heard. “This is a wonderful opportunity for all Africans,” said Gabriel Messan Kodjo, a former Prime Minister of Togo. “Of course, we can read the texts any time, but to have Father and Mother Moon here in person is a once-in-a-lifetime event.”

“Father Moon offers some very innovative ideas towards the universal concept of peace that forms the pillars of UPF,” said Madhav Kumar Nepal, until a few months ago Prime Minister of Nepal. “In this era of global crisis, these ideas need to be given serious consideration.”

