

Peace Education Conference Held in Nigeria

Raphael Ogar Oko
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Lagos, Nigeria - The Lagos state chapter of UPF-Nigeria organized a one-day peace education conference to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the return to democratic governance in Nigeria and the UN International Day of Families at the Oyo Hall of the Lagos Airport Hotel in Ikeja, Lagos on May 29, 2014. The theme of the conference was "Promoting Inter-ethnic Marriage as an Instrument for National Unification."

The conference was attended by Ambassadors for Peace in Lagos state, distinguished officials and leaders of faith-based and non-governmental organizations. The conference commenced with a recitation of the National Anthem of Nigeria, followed by opening invocation from representatives of Islam, Christianity and African traditional religions. The welcome address was delivered on behalf of the chairman of UPF-Nigeria (Lagos state chapter), Bishop Abiodun Olugbenga, by the secretary of the state chapter. In his remarks, Bishop Olugbenga called on the Ambassadors for Peace in Lagos state to wake up to the challenges facing the nation at this time and to also respond to the calling of the founders of the UPF to renew our nation to build lasting peace. "We remain eternally grateful to Dr. Sun Myung Moon and his wife for the vision to establish the Universal Peace Federation and the Ambassadors for Peace initiative. They have provided us a strong vehicle to drive our nation to a peaceful destination."



His welcome remarks were followed by a video presentation introducing the Universal Peace Federation, which provided a deeper insight into the diversity of the work of the UPF around the world. Professor Ralph Akinfeleye's opening remarks focused on the relevance of the theme of the conference and the need for peace education in Nigeria. He called on Ambassadors for Peace to consider growing from being honorary Ambassadors for Peace to becoming professional peace educators and leaders who can serve the people of Nigeria to be able to live in peace.



Dr. Chinwe Nwanna of the University of Lagos gave the keynote lecture on the theme. She spoke on the many advantages of inter-ethnic marriages in Nigeria and pointed out that there was a growing interest in inter ethnic marriage. “Every marriage has its challenges that need to be overcome; the benefits of inter ethnic marriage outweigh the obvious challenges.” She proposed the need for government involvement in funding of educational programs to encourage inter-ethnic marriage as well as sponsorship of wedding ceremonies for inter ethnic couples. Her inspiring lecture generated frequent applause from participants, and she concluded with an appeal to Ambassadors for Peace to make a new commitment to make “this theory of inter-ethnic marriage become a best practice in Nigeria by guiding your children to marry persons from other ethnic groups in Nigeria as a way to promote national integration and unification.”

The secretary general of UPF Nigeria, Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, spoke on the commemoration of Democracy Day in Nigeria and explained the significance of the present political dispensation in Nigeria. “Throughout the history of independent Nigeria, this is the first time that Nigeria is experiencing the 15th year of uninterrupted democratic governance. Nigeria has produced the first generation of 15-year olds who do not have any experience of direct military rule in Nigeria.” He showed the historical similarities in the leadership of Nigeria from 1959 to 1979, 1979 to 1999 and 1999 to 2019, which he termed as the first, second and third dispensations. “During the first dispensation, which began in 1959, democratic governance lasted for only seven years before the military took over in 1966 and ruled until 1979. During the second dispensation, which began in 1979, democratic governance lasted for only four years before the military took over in 1983 and ruled for 16 years until 1999. The third dispensation began in 1999 with democratic governance and now we have not experienced military take over for the past 15 years. We need to commend our nation and her people,” Dr. Oko said.



The conference also featured a special presentation on “The Need for Peace Education in Nigeria” and strategies for promoting inter-ethnic marriages for national unification of Nigeria. The interactive question-and-answer session provided opportunities for Ambassadors for Peace to gain deeper insight into the marriage blessing program of the UPF founders and how Nigeria can grow from amalgamation to unification through the promotion of inter-ethnic marriages. In his reflection, one newly-appointed Ambassador for Peace, Rt. Rev. Isaac Afolayan of the Mary Slessor Memorial Presbyterian Cathedral in Port Harcourt, wrote as follows: “The program was highly educative, informative and full of insights. I

am particularly inspired by the life of Rev. Moon and his wife. By God's grace, I hope to also impact my generation in pursuing peace. I will go with the message to my church and all my subjects and will impact them with same message of peace."



After exhaustive deliberations on the theme of the peace education conference as well as on the UN International Day of Families and the 15th anniversary of democracy in Nigeria, participants resolved to work hard to ensure that Nigeria becomes a peaceful nation by 2020 through promoting interreligious dialogue, inter-ethnic marriages and strengthening of families in Nigeria. Twelve distinguished participants were commissioned as Ambassadors for Peace at the closing session of the conference. It was also agreed that the Lagos state chapter of the UPF Nigeria shall develop strategies to engage the Ambassadors for Peace in raising up 120 Ambassadors for Peace in Lagos state.



The zonal coordinator of UPF-Nigeria in charge of Lagos, Oyo and Ogun States thanked all the Ambassadors for Peace for attending the conference and called on them to reach out to their neighborhoods to let people know about the work of UPF. Arrangements are being made for an upcoming peace education conference for educators in Lagos state.