

UPF Nigeria: Promotes Peacebuilding

Raphael Ogar Oko
July 9, 2015



Abuja, Nigeria—Cultivating the right attitude and acquiring relevant knowledge and skills for conflict resolution and national reconciliation were the focus of a seminar presented by UPF.

More than 50 Ambassadors for Peace attended the capacity-building program, which was held by UPF-Nigeria in partnership with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) on July 9, 2015, at the IPCR offices in the capital, Abuja.



UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko gave the welcoming address. He explained that the program was designed to educate Ambassadors for Peace about the UPF vision for peace to enable them have the right attitude, knowledge and skills to serve as Ambassadors for Peace in their communities. The program also was meant to introduce the UPF perspective to peacebuilding and conflict resolution and to present the Ambassadors for Peace with an opportunity to learn about the work of the IPCR.

Dr. Oko commended the participants for their interest in promoting peace and urged them to use the opportunity to learn invaluable tips that would be applied directly in the field and to become men and women dedicated to building a world of peace.

The chairman of the occasion, Dr. Sam Anurigwo, challenged IPCR and UPF to promote and publicize an action plan to what respective groups were doing with regard to peace and conflict resolution in Nigeria. He stated: "Peacebuilding begins from the family, and if any family can bring peace into the structure of their day-to-day running, then we can succeed in our communities, we can succeed in our states, we can succeed as a nation to bring peace about. Peace does not emerge automatically; peace has to be built by human beings, and the processes of doing that are numerous. So we have to think globally and act locally because our house has to be in order before we can be part of the larger society."

A minute of silence was observed in honor of Una Bassey Smart, UPF director of resource development, who passed on in June 2015 at the age of 55 years.



IPCR Director General Professor Oshita O. Oshita in his keynote address said that the institute supported the ideas of UPF-Nigeria, which was collaborating with the IPCR on mentoring young people to respond to conflict issues wherever they find themselves.

The director general noted that conflict and peacebuilding must be handled expertly, adding that an unprofessional approach would only result in more casualties. Given the intermittent nature of conflict in the society, he said, there was a need to provide more men and women with the skills to handle conflict-related issues through constant training and retraining, stressing that "no one should be under the illusion that he has suddenly become an expert."

The first presentation during the plenary sessions was by Rev. George M. Ogurie, the national president of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification-Nigeria, a UPF-affiliated organization. His presentation on the UPF Vision for Peace emphasized the UPF Founders' vision for the realization of a peaceful world and the need for the consciousness that all human beings are members of one global family under God.

Dr. George C. Ikpot, UPF-Nigeria director of international affairs, spoke on the root causes of conflict, emphasizing that at the root of all the conflicts throughout human history is selfishness, putting self-interest before the interests of others. He therefore called on Ambassadors for Peace to cultivate the attitude of living for the sake of others as a tool for resolving all conflicts in our society. The presentation underscored the limitations of fighting and dialogue alone as approaches to conflict resolution and emphasized genuine reconciliation.

It was explained even though fighting may sometimes be necessary, it does not bring about a sustainable resolution of conflicts as the defeated do not give up the desire to seek revenge. Although dialogue may bring the contenders to sign peace pacts, signing agreements without dealing with the root cause of the conflict may not end the conflict. Dr. Ikpot recommended that the most sustainable approach to conflict resolution was the strategy of genuine reconciliation, which, in his words, "wins the heart of the persons to voluntarily give you any desire to revenge."

Three key presentations were made by directors from the IPCR. One presentation that captured the essence of the training program was “Conflicts and Peacebuilding” by Grace Awodu and Andy Ikemneme, senior research officers of the institute. The researchers said that the IPCR has been involved in peacebuilding, conflict management and election observation since 2000.



Ms. Awodu said that conflict situations often arose from struggles over power or resources, and that they could be violent or non-violent, destructive or constructive, negative or positive, and functional or dysfunctional. She proffered the method of dialogue as a constructive way to resolve conflict, adding that it can be initiated once an agreement was entered into between willing parties. She further cautioned against embarking on conflict resolution without the requisite understanding of what the process involved.

Participants also listened to the proposal for the launch of a National Reconciliation Initiative by the UPF-Nigeria secretary general as a practical way of utilizing the knowledge and skills acquired from the program. Taking into consideration that the 2015 general elections were over with emergence of winners and losers, Nigeria was still confronted with several challenges threatening the continuous existence of the nation as one united country. Therefore, it was resolved that the Ambassadors for Peace should take the lead in promoting national reconciliation by embarking on initiatives that will promote reconciliation along religious, regional and resources divides.

Three new members were inducted as Ambassadors for Peace, and participants received certificates of participation. The Ambassadors for Peace were very inspired by the quality of presentation and their understanding of the vision of the UPF Founders. They expressed their determination to continue to expand the scope of the vision for peace to their local families and communities.

