

## UPF-Nigeria: 21 Ambassadors for Peace take an Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage

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**Calabar, Nigeria** -- Twenty-one Ambassadors for Peace took part in an Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage to promote interreligious harmony and cooperation.

UPF-Nigeria organized the National Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage to show that Ambassadors for Peace are committed to working together, transcending religious and ethnic affiliations for the sake of peace and sustainable development.

The pilgrimage was launched in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, beginning on August 14 and ending on August 16, 2016, in partnership with the Christians and Muslims Interreligious Peace Foundation, an NGO based in Minna, the capital of Niger State, and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, based in Calabar. Enemali Ugbaje, an intern at the UPF-Nigeria Directorate of Interreligious Affairs, facilitated the program.

The pilgrimage involved visits to religious sites and houses of worship as well as to religious leaders and religious organizations and the Cross River State House of Assembly. The participants were Ambassadors for Peace affiliated with Islam, Christianity, Rosicrucian Order, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, and Eckankar as well as educational administrators and government officials from Niger State, Rivers State, and the three senatorial districts of Cross River State.

Participating Ambassadors for Peace from Abuja, Minna and Lagos arrived in Calabar on August 14 and were met at the airport by participants from Cross River State. Declan Ogar Genesis, special assistant to the Cross River State governor, and Rev. Williams Sam William, the UPF coordinator for Cross River, Akwa Ibom and Abia states, welcomed the participants at the airport and brought them to the Adrian's Place hotel. The Right Honorable Ogana Lukpata, a member of the Cross River State House of Assembly and an Ambassador for Peace, welcomed the participants at the hotel and provided an official vehicle to support the program. At the welcoming meeting, participants were told that Cross River State is known as the "People's Paradise" and that Calabar means "Come and Live and Be at Rest," implying that the city and the state are holy and peaceful.

An orientation was followed by a visit to the Tinapa Resort, a government-owned tourist center, on the evening of August 14. The pilgrims were shown the facilities at the resort and were offered some light refreshments by Alphonsus Ogar Eba, a director general with a state government agency who is also an Ambassador for Peace based in Calabar. After their visit to the resort, participants returned to their hotel for dinner and interfaith prayers for national peace before finally ending the day's activities and briefing on the activities for the following day.

### Visit to the Rosicrucian Order

The second day of the pilgrimage, August 15, began with a visit to the Rosicrucian Order park. The Rosicrucian Order is a community of seekers who study and practice the metaphysical laws governing the universe. Leaders and members of the order's West African regional office welcomed the pilgrims, and a representative of the order offered the opening invocation. All of the pilgrims and all the members of the

host organization introduced themselves. UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko gave the opening remarks, introducing UPF, its founders, and its vision and mission. Dr. Oko also explained the purpose of the Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage initiative as a project inspired by the lifelong advocacy by the UPF founders for interreligious harmony and cooperation.

Representatives of the host organization, the Ancient Mystical Order of Rosae Crucis (AMORC), explained to the pilgrims about their movement, what they teach and how to join, as well as their core beliefs. The presentation was quite interesting, as some negative perceptions of the movement were addressed during the question and answer session. The pilgrims offered prayers for the nation and for world peace, while the AMORC leaders expressed their gratitude to the UPF founders for their vision for peace through interfaith cooperation. At the closing session Rosicrucian leader Ntufam John Omori was presented with an Ambassador for Peace certificate by two of the interfaith pilgrims representing Islam and the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, while the Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage medal was presented by Ambassador James Bake and Ambassador Mrs. Sarah Bake.

### **Visit to Cross River State House of Assembly**

Next the team visited the state House of Assembly, where they met with the speaker of the House of Assembly, Hon. John Gaul Lebo. UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko introduced the members of the team and spoke on the purpose of the visit. The Ambassadors for Peace were joined by three other members of the House of Assembly who are also Ambassadors for Peace. The visit provided an opportunity for them to urge the lawmakers to create laws that will promote and support interreligious harmony and strong families, as well as the development and utilization of effective resources. Also, the lawmakers were briefed on the recent launch of the Parliamentarians for Peace in Korea and Burkina Faso. Hon. Ogana Lukpata testified about his experience at the International Leadership Conference in Korea and the true demonstration of love by Mother Moon. He called on the speaker and other lawmakers to seriously consider joining UPF and working with the organization to build a peaceful state.

Hon. Lebo was presented with the certificate of recognition as Ambassador for Peace. Responding, he thanked UPF for the vision for peace and said that as an Ambassador for Peace and a parliamentarian, he will do everything possible to make laws that will lead to the realization of peace in the state and the nation. He offered to reach out to his colleagues in the 36 states of Nigeria to launch the Nigerian Parliamentarians for Peace association. He called on UPF to consider working together with the Cross River State House of Assembly and requested that UPF should “send us a draft proposal of a proposed bill for the establishment of the Cross River State Peace Council.”



### **Visit to Brotherhood of the Cross and Star and the Muslim Mosque**

The Brotherhood of the Cross and Star is an influential spiritual movement, with international headquarters in Calabar. The spiritual leader of the organization, His Holiness Olumba Olumba Obu, is revered by his faithful as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The pilgrims arrived at the headquarters of the BCS and were received by representatives of the leader. They were entertained by the group choir and later listened to the teachings of the organization which focused on love, peace and being our brothers' keepers as children of God. The session provided an opportunity for the pilgrims to ask questions about the movement, which were all answered.

The program at the BCS headquarters ended with words of encouragement to the Ambassadors for Peace to hold onto their great commissioning as peace ambassadors and work for peace in Nigeria as the children of God.

The pilgrims next visited the Muslim community mosque at Bogobiri in Calabar, where more than 40 Muslims were waiting to meet them. The program began with opening remarks by Hajiya Fatima Ibrahim Mama, president of the Christians and Muslims Interreligious Peace Foundation. Opening prayers were offered by the secretary of the Muslim community. The UPF secretary general then spoke on the vision of UPF, the calling of the UPF founder and the activities around the world, especially with Muslim communities. The pilgrims listened to testimonies by the Muslim leaders of peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians in Cross River State as well as words of encouragement and commendation of the government of Cross River State on their timely response to security challenges in the state. They were full of praise for the Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage initiative by Ambassadors for Peace and requested that their leaders also should be included in the team during the second phase of the pilgrimage.



The program ended later in the evening at the hotel, where the pilgrims were presented with a certificate of participation after a general review meeting and endorsement of the resolution. The participants emphasized the need for this initiative to be sustained and called for the government to provide the enabling platform for promotion of interreligious dialogue. Part of the resolution of the participants reads thus:

“There is a growing emphasis on the need for interreligious dialogue, and it is important that all religious groups should embrace dialogue to understand each other and achieve the needed reconciliation, which each of them seeks to do for the people. The establishment of government-supported interreligious structures and the development of an interreligious infrastructure will facilitate interreligious dialogue and reconciliation.

“There is therefore the need for the establishment of the Federal Ministry for Interreligious Affairs and the National Assembly Committee on Interreligious Affairs, as well as the need to introduce interreligious education in schools and to establish a National Interreligious Center. We recommend the introduction of interfaith pilgrimages and invite all people of faith to consider working together for the salvation of our nation and the world.

“In addition, the challenges in Nigeria call for an Interreligious Youth Service program to educate young faith-based leaders to reducing cases of religious extremism. We appeal to all religious people to stand against any attack on worship places and persons throughout the country. In situations of perceived differences, we call on all people to embrace dialogue for reconciliation of differences.

“Dialogue cannot take place in a vacuum but needs to be facilitated and needs a dialogue center. Being aware that dialogue involves more than one person or party, a structure to reach out is needed and a place for the stakeholders to meet as a neutral ground is fundamental. So, while we advocate for the promotion of an interreligious dialogue culture, we should understand the critical need for an interreligious structure and infrastructure.”

Arrangements are now in progress for the second Ambassadors for Peace Interfaith Peace Pilgrimage, which we hope will attract more participants and visits to more houses of worship as well as include an interreligious leaders conference. The event in Calabar was reported by local radio and television stations as well as newspapers.