

## Parliamentarians Association Is Launched in Nigeria

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Abuja, Nigeria—The Nigerian chapter of the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) has been launched at a ceremony at the National Assembly.

With the theme “The Role of Parliamentarians in Creating a Culture of Sustainable Peace,” the inauguration was held on June 5, 2017, at the Senate Wing of the National Assembly. The participants from across the country included parliamentarians from the local, state and national assemblies, traditional and religious leaders, and Ambassadors for Peace.

The launch was held in collaboration with the Senate Committee on National Security and Intelligence, under the sponsorship of Distinguished Senator Muhammadu Shaaba Lafiaji, and the House Committee on Human Rights, under the sponsorship of Hon. Edward Gyang Pwajok.

A total of 227 participants attended. The breakdown of participants is as follows:

- Federal parliamentarians or their representatives – 11
- State parliamentarians – 11
- Local government council parliamentarians – 28
- Former parliamentarians (federal) - 6
- Traditional rulers – 10
- Religious leaders – 9
- Business executives – 6
- Civil servants – 13
- Ambassadors for Peace – 88
- Former governor of Kogi State’s wife; honorable minister for Women Affairs (represented)
- Senior special assistant to the president on Niger Delta
- Members of the Nigerian chapter of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, an affiliated organization – 30
- UPF core staff – 12

The launch focused on the role of parliamentarians in creating a culture of sustainable peace, with discussions on the issues of interreligious harmony and cooperation and the need for a peace code of conduct, a peace curriculum of education, and a national peace constitution.

The program was coordinated by Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, secretary general of UPF-Nigeria. The event began with general recognition and introduction of some participants from across the country. Oba Emmanuel led the singing of the national anthem, which was preceded by an opening interfaith invocation by representatives of Islam, Christianity, the Hare Krishna movement, and the Unification movement.

The event was chaired by Hon. Edward Gyang Pwajok, who represents the Jos South/East federal constituency of Plateau State at the Federal House of Representatives. Hon. Pwajok in his welcoming address stated that IAPP could not have come at a better time, given the numerous challenges facing the country: economic issues that create tensions, sociopolitical unrest that causes destruction of lives and property and the displacement of people. He said the IAPP will provide parliamentarians the forum to focus on the pursuit of peace. He praised the UPF founders for their love and sacrifice in establishing many peace organizations, such as IAPP, to point people in the direction of peace and thus realize a peaceful world.



Sen. Ibrahim Mantu, the chair of UPF-Nigeria and former deputy president of the Senate, also praised the UPF founders for establishing IAPP. He said he believed the new association will carry with it the spiritual energy and passion of the founders toward the realization of a peaceful society, nation and world. “The IAPP will be a forum where current and former parliamentarians can interact,” he said. “Current parliamentarians will be able to gain important insights and mentoring from former parliamentarians in an organized but non-partisan setting with a view to a wider dissemination of best practices.” As he was unavoidably absent, his speech was read by Dr. George C. Ikpot, the secretary general of Professors World Peace Academy (PWPA) of Nigeria, an affiliated organization.

An introductory video showing the inauguration of IAPP in Korea and in various nations around the world captured the attention of the audience.

Hon. Ben Nwankwo, representing the Orumba North/South federal constituency of Anambra State, gave a rousing speech in which he urged Nigerians to do more nation-building than playing politics. He said he believed peace is achievable in Nigeria if we heed the words of our founding national anthem: “Though tribes and tongues may differ, in brotherhood we stand.” He said, in conclusion, that as a parliamentarian he had found the meaning of IAPP for himself—“I Am Peace Personified”—and thanked the founders for establishing this wonderful movement.

Goodwill messages were presented by several personalities. Mrs. Esther Eghobamien Mshelia, representing the Honorable Minister for Women Affairs, Sen. Mrs. Aisha Jumai Alhassan, drew attention to about 1.2 million persons (mostly women and children) displaced in the nation’s North East political zone. She enjoined parliamentarians to make laws that protect women from violence of any kind. She noted that gender inequality is still a serious problem in our part of the world and that this is an area to which parliamentarians must pay serious attention.

Mr. Justin Ibezim Agudosi from Lagos, representing the business community, said that each of us should consider ourselves as “parliamentarians,” in the sense that we all can contribute to making laws that are conducive to peaceful living. Businesspeople should contribute to peace by investing in peacebuilding, he said. He stated that parliamentarians should consider laws that make it mandatory for businesses to make such contributions and that IAPP would be a perfect forum in which proposals for such laws could be well articulated.

Alhaji Mohammed Ibrahim Gashash, an Ambassador for Peace from Kaduna State, stated that if parliamentarians pay attention to issues that militate against peaceful coexistence, we indeed will achieve sustainable peace.

Her Excellency Ambassador Aisha Audu Emeje, wife of a former governor of Kogi State, read the IAPP inaugural address of founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. In that speech Dr. Moon emphasized the role of parliamentarians and encouraged them to form the IAPP centered on the principle of living for the sake of others and centered on God, our Heavenly Parent.

To end the opening session in the parliamentary tradition, the speaker of the Abaji Local Government Assembly, Hon. Abubakar Sadiq Yahaya, was asked to lead a motion for the establishment of the

Nigerian chapter of IAPP. “Those in support of the motion, say, ‘Aye’; those against, say, ‘Nay.’” The Ayes had it, he said. So the IAPP Nigerian chapter was formally established. All participants sang a resolution of adoption of the proposal for the establishment of IAPP.

The second session to address the theme “The Role of Parliamentarians in Creating a Culture of Sustainable Peace” started with a presentation on the UPF Peace Principles and the Interfaith Peace Blessing, given by FFWPU National Leader Rev. George M. Ogurie. He explained that the Interfaith Peace Blessing is a fundamental foundation for the peace we all yearn for, from the family level to the national and world levels. He said that even in our present circumstance, the Interfaith Peace Blessing, which strongly encourages interethnic, intercultural and international marriages, is a potent tool for national unity and integration. He invited everyone to participate in the Interfaith Peace Blessing.



His Royal Highness Alhaji Audu Shaban Nizazo III, the Etsu of Kwali in the Federal Capital Territory, expressed his appreciation for the work of UPF in the country over the years. He noted that of the three tiers of government—federal, state and local—local administration has been mostly robbed of its authority. This state of affairs has not augured well for development at the grass-roots level, as the local administration has been quite ineffective in providing basic services, he noted. He therefore expressed satisfaction at the inclusion of local parliamentarians in the membership of IAPP and hoped that it can be a step toward redressing the imbalance in capacity of local parliamentarians, vis-à-vis the other tiers of government.

To conclude the proceedings, Hon. Edward Gyang Pwajok thanked all the speakers and participants for traveling long distances to attend this important launching at the National Assembly. He said it was an indication of their seriousness to address issues that will bring about peace in the nation. He related his experience while attending a similar launching of IAPP in Washington, D.C., on November 30, 2016, and testified to the caliber of people who came from around the world. He once again praised the founders for bringing together such serious-minded and peace-loving leaders to establish such an organization.

UPF-Nigeria Secretary General Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, who served as the master of ceremonies of the event, announced the presentation of the Peace Loving Global Citizen Award to the Senate President, Sen. Bukola Saraki. The certificate was presented and received on his behalf by his senior legislative assistant.

Ambassador for Peace certificates were also presented to nine distinguished personalities, including federal, state and local council parliamentarians. Dr. Oko announced that in the near future, zonal chapters of IAPP will be launched in the six geopolitical zones of the country to give the new association a national spread.

The event was reported on national radio stations and TV stations too, as well as in local newspapers.

With the successful launch of the IAPP at the National Assembly in Abuja, all is now set for a nationwide mobilization of parliamentarians in Nigeria to join the movement, as well as the development of programs to build the capacity of parliamentarians to work together for peace and to connect them to information, each other and resources for peacebuilding.