

UPF Nigeria commemorates United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2018

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World Interfaith Harmony Week Observed in Nigeria at the National Ecumenical Center

The Universal Peace Federation (Nigeria) organized a series of activities to commemorate the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2018 in Nigeria from February 1 – 7, 2018 and has created much impact and follow up activities in the nation. In addition, the Christian Association of Nigeria has commended the UPF for the commitment to the realization of interfaith harmony in Nigeria. The commendation was conveyed in an endorsement letter by the Coordinating Chaplain of the National Ecumenical Center in Abuja. Similar letters have been issued by a community leader and a non-profit organization that participated in the activities in Nigeria.

In November 2017 UPF Nigeria organized a seven days' workshop on Divine Principle and Peace Education in Abuja. About 60 participants comprising of Ambassadors for Peace from Christian, Muslim and Native Region backgrounds, as well as core UPF staff were in attendance. The workshop featured lectures on interfaith relations, peace building and an interfaith pilgrimage to the National Mosque and the National Ecumenical Center, both in Abuja. At the National Mosque, participants were received by the Executive Secretary of the National Mosque and prayers were offered by representatives of the various religious traditions in Nigeria for peace and for the success of the 2018 WIHW.



At the National Ecumenical Center, the Assistant Secretary General of the Christian Association of Nigeria received the interfaith pilgrims and commended the UPF for bringing leaders of different faiths together to pray for harmony and peace and for the successful conduct of the WIHW 2018 in Nigeria and around the world. Prayers were offered by representatives of the various faiths at the National Ecumenical Center before the pilgrims departed to the Peace Embassy for the closing ceremony of the preparatory workshop for Ambassadors for Peace.

Also, a special introductory seminar for scholars of African Traditional Religions was organized in the University of Ibadan on the need for interfaith harmony in Nigeria in recognition of the challenges that the Nigeria nation was facing in interfaith relations especially between Muslims, Christians and the Traditional Religionists. These events provided opportunities to create awareness about the interfaith harmony week.

The main activities of the 2018 WIHW in Nigeria began on February 1, 2018 with the media conference in Abuja at the Peace Embassy. The conference brought together 13 faith based media practitioners and religious educators to address them on the program of activities for the celebration in Nigeria. Discussion focused on the need for interfaith harmony and the role of media professionals in the promotion and strengthening of interfaith harmony in Nigeria. We used the opportunity to call for the creation of interfaith committee at the National Assembly, the proclamation of World Interfaith Harmony Week in Nigeria as an official interfaith observation week as well as the creation of Ministry for Interreligious Affairs and the introduction of Interfaith Youth Service Corps scheme for young faith based leaders in Nigeria. The event was reported by Radio Nigeria Kapital FM 92.9 Abuja.

On February 2, 2018, the UPF Nigeria visited the Executive Secretary of the National Mosque in Abuja with some Muslim leaders and requested for the week's Jummat Service at the National Mosque to promote the WIHW. We thereafter designated some selected Muslim leaders as Interfaith Ambassadors for Peace and urged them to promote interfaith harmony in their local communities.



The Religious Youth Assembly brought together youth leaders from diverse faiths to deliberate on the need for interfaith harmony and the role of young people in particular. This was held at the UPF Peace Education Center in Wuse 2 Abuja. Participants discussed the need for interfaith harmony and strategies for sustainable interfaith relations for peace and development. The one day conference was held on February 3 and it provided opportunities to plan for the main event on February 4 at the National Ecumenical Center. Some of the young leaders volunteered and served at the follow up events during the week.

Being aware of the serious division and denominational factions among Christian groups in Nigeria, the UPF Nigeria worked directly with the Office of the National President of the Christian Association on Nigeria to organize the Interfaith Christian Sunday Service at National Ecumenical Christian Center as the main event of this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week in Nigeria. Despite the fact that the National Ecumenical Center has existed for many years in Abuja, Christian leaders have not been able to work together to organize interdenominational worship service at the center. On Sundays, the denominational churches are busy but the National Church building was always locked up in the morning.

As part of the World Interfaith Harmony Week 2018 celebration in Nigeria, the UPF Nigeria in collaboration with Christian Association of Nigeria organized the first National Interdenominational

Worship Service at the National Ecumenical Center in Abuja. The beautiful building was open in the morning for Christians who were invited from different denominations to attend the program. The worship service featured songs of worship, reading of scriptures, lighting of the harmony candle and presentation of awards to individuals and couples as well as testimonies and background information on the world interfaith harmony week.



Inspired by the response of the Christians from different denominations, the Coordinating Chaplain of the National Ecumenical Center declared that every Sunday from February 4, the National Ecumenical Center shall be open for interdenominational worship service for Christians as a way of encouraging harmony among Christians. A special feature of the interdenominational worship service was the "Candle Lightning Ceremony" where all the participants lit their candle from the central candle provided at the national alter. Each lit candle represents receiving the light from One Source and taking it home to share with others. The over 300 participants all lit their candles and went home with the light from the Ecumenical center.

During the celebration, some selected Christian leaders were designated as interfaith Ambassadors for Peace and come couples were honored for their exemplary lifestyles. Most of the honored couples were interdenominational couples who came from different denominations but have been married for up to 10 years. Since the "Interfaith Harmony Week Worship Service", Christians from several denominations have been meeting every week for an interdenominational service at the National Ecumenical Christian center in Abuja. The Boys Brigade Choir and the Tabitha Arise choir entertained at the service.



The world interfaith harmony week celebration ended with Interfaith Harmony Week Celebration Banquet which brought together Ambassadors for Peace and religious leaders for a dinner at the 805 Restaurant. Participants discussed follow up plans with the determination to continue promoting diverse activities for interfaith harmony in Nigeria. These events have actually created serious awareness about

the WIHW in Nigeria and by 2019, many activities will be organized by various groups. The Ambassadors for Peace of the UPF Nigeria have created a Committee on Interfaith Harmony to ensure that the issue of interfaith harmony and cooperation is given the needed attention in Nigeria.

Several religious leaders, parliamentarians, community leaders, scholars, women and youth leaders participated in the activities to mark the World Interfaith Harmony Week in Nigeria.

Some Media links

Online photos: photos.app.goo.gl/RUq6x2sGufuGVNUg1

kapital929.fm/can-calls-proactive-measure-restore-peace-nigeria/

CAN Calls For Proactive Measure To Restore Peace In Nigeria

newsdiaryonline.com/upf-nigeria-announces-activities-commemorate-2018-world-interfaith-harmony-week/

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UPF Nigeria announces activities to commemorate 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week

web.facebook.com/events/173985536520185/?_rdc=1&_rdr

Facebook links: Interfaith service

web.facebook.com/raphaelogar.oko/media_set?set=a.2390474574311397.1073742065.100000466335389&type=3

Preparatory workshop

web.facebook.com/raphaelogar.oko/media_set?set=a.2275445749147614.1073742061.100000466335389&type=3

web.facebook.com/media/set/?set=oa.1656774657691611&type=3

web.facebook.com/search/top/?q=traditional%20religious%20scholars%20for%20peace