

## UPF-Nigeria activities to commemorate the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

Raphael Ogar Oko  
February 8, 2018



**Abuja, Nigeria** -- UPF-Nigeria organized a series of activities to commemorate the 2018 United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW).

Religious leaders, parliamentarians, community leaders, scholars, women and youth leaders participated in the activities.

The Nigerian chapter of UPF received a commendation from the Christian Association of Nigeria for its commitment to realizing 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 were issued by a community leader and a non-profit organization that participated in the activities in Nigeria.

### **Preparatory Programs**

To create awareness of the significance of World Interfaith Harmony Week, which falls in the first week of February every year, UPF-Nigeria organized interfaith harmony seminars and interfaith pilgrimages in November 2017.

In recognition of the challenges to interfaith relations in Nigeria, especially between Muslims, Christians and the traditional religionists, a special introductory seminar for scholars of African traditional religions was organized at the University of Ibadan.

A preliminary program brought together in Abuja more than 60 Ambassadors for Peace comprising Muslims, Christians and Traditionalists for a seven-day seminar on interfaith peacebuilding. The workshop featured lectures on interfaith relations, peacebuilding 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, and representatives of Nigeria's religious traditions offered prayers for peace and for the success of the 2018 World Interfaith Harmony Week.

At the National Ecumenical Center, the assistant secretary general of the Christian Association of Nigeria received the interfaith pilgrims and commended UPF for bringing leaders of different faiths together to pray for harmony and peace and for the successful conduct of WIHW 2018 in Nigeria and around the world. Representatives of the various faiths also offered prayers before the pilgrims departed to the UPF Peace Embassy for the closing ceremony of the preparatory workshop for Ambassadors for Peace.

### **Media Conference**

The main activities of the 2018 WIHW in Nigeria began on February 1 with a media conference in Abuja at the UPF Peace Embassy. The conference brought together 13 faith-based media practitioners and religious educators to explain the program of activities for the celebration in Nigeria.

Discussion focused on the need for interfaith harmony and the role of media professionals in promoting and strengthening interfaith harmony in Nigeria. We used the opportunity to call for the creation of an 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 a Ministry for Interreligious Affairs and the introduction of an Interfaith Youth Service Corps for young faith-based leaders in Nigeria. The event was reported by Radio Nigeria Kapital FM 92.9 Abuja.

### **Visit to the National Mosque**



On February 2, UPF-Nigeria visited the executive secretary of the National Mosque in Abuja with some Muslim leaders and requested that the week's Jummat Service at the National Mosque 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.

### **Religious Youth Assembly**

On February 3, a 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 Abuja's Wuse District. Participants discussed the need for interfaith harmony and strategies for sustainable interfaith relations for peace and development. The one-day conference 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.

### **Interfaith Christian Sunday Service**

The main event of this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration was an Interfaith Christian Sunday Service at the National Ecumenical Center on February 4.

Being aware of the serious divisions and denominational factions among Christian groups in Nigeria, UPF worked directly with the Office of the National President of the Christian Association of Nigeria to organize the interfaith service. Although the National Ecumenical Center has existed for many years in Abuja, Christian leaders have not been able to work together to organize interdenominational worship services there.

The beautiful building was opened in the morning of February 4 for Christians from different denominations who were invited to attend the program. The service featured songs of worship, reading of Scriptures, lighting of the harmony candle, presentation of awards to individuals and couples, as well as testimonies and background information on World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Inspired by the response of Christians from different denominations, the coordinating chaplain of the National Ecumenical Center declared that every Sunday from now on, the center would be open for interdenominational worship services as a way of encouraging harmony among Christians.

A special feature of the interdenominational service was the "Candle Lighting Ceremony" in which each participant lit a candle from the central candle provided at the national altar. Each lit candle represented receiving the light from One Source and taking it home to share with others. More than 300 participants

lit their candles and went home with the light.

During the celebration, selected Christian leaders were designated as Interfaith Ambassadors for Peace and some couples were honored for their exemplary lifestyles. Most of the honored couples were interdenominational couples who have been married for up to 10 years. The Boys Brigade Choir and the Tabitha Arise Choir entertained at the service.



### **Interfaith Harmony Week Celebration Banquet**

The World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration ended with an celebration banquet, which brought together Ambassadors for Peace and religious leaders for 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 created serious awareness about the WIHW in Nigeria, and by 2019, many activities will be organized by various groups. The Ambassadors for Peace of 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.

