

Religious Youth Assembly in Nigeria Adopts Proposals for Interreligious Cooperation

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Abuja, Nigeria - The inaugural Religious Youth Assembly 2014 ended in Abuja with the resolution, determination and commitment by the religious youth leaders to work together beyond their religious denominations for the sake of national peace and unification. The religious youth assembly was convened by UPF-Nigeria as part of the 6th international conference on youth and interfaith dialogue which focused on the role of religion in peace, security and countering violent extremism. The assembly was held on Nov. 29, 2014 at the National Merit award House, Maitama, Abuja with youth leaders from different religious groups including Islam, Pentecostal churches, Eckankar, Rosicrucian order, Catholics, Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, Unification movement, Deeper Life and other faith-based groups as well as the children of Ambassadors for Peace and other interfaith civil society organization leaders. Some Ambassadors for Peace and representatives of government agencies also attended the event which was jointly organized by the Universal Peace Federation – Nigeria and New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation in partnership with United Religions Initiative (URI-Africa) and Bege Foundation, Jos.



The opening invocation by five different religious youth leaders set the stage for the day's event. Patmeh Patrick from the Brotherhood of Cross and Star was the first to pray and was followed by a Muslim prayer. The representative of the Eckankar led the session with the HU and asked everyone to join. This

was followed by a youth leader from the Deeper Life Bible Church from Port Harcourt on behalf of Christianity, and the UPF Director of Interreligious Affairs, Rev. Sunday Uke, concluded the prayers in the names of all the saints and prophets of all religions and in the “name of our heavenly parents.”



After the recitation of the national anthem of Nigeria, Emmanuel Ande, CEO of New Era Educational and Charitable Support Foundation, gave the welcome address, which was applauded periodically as he called on the youth leaders to become the new hope of the nation by living beyond their differences. Ambassador for Peace Kingsley Edemi from Delta state, who chaired the assembly, thanked the youth leaders for their determination to be the change they are yearning for. In his words: “We are always told that youth are the leaders of tomorrow, and since tomorrow has never come, let us start to become the leaders today and grow into the future.”

The keynote address was the address delivered by UPF Founder, Dr. Sun Myung Moon, at the Assembly of the World’s Religions in MacAfee, New Jersey, USA - November 15, 1985. The address, read by Rev. Sunday Uke, provided a context for the youth assembly. Some of the words were so contemporary that they might have been given just this month. The participants agreed with the opening part of the address, which was read as follows: “We come from different religious backgrounds. Our answers to the fundamental problems of human existence are not identical. Our understandings of the causes of human suffering do not have the same frame of reference. Our ways of seeking world peace are diverse. But still we have a common ground: all of us try to solve problems in the context of our relations with the Ultimate. Throughout East and West, North and South, people living in the situation of sin, disbelief and confusion have yearned for the love, happiness and peace that is true and eternal. They have been making every effort to overcome the temptations of their evil desires and, by following their good desires, to find the happiness with which their original mind will rejoice.”

The presentation concluded with these timeless words: “I have three hopes for these Assemblies. First, that the world’s religious traditions respect each other and at least work to keep in check any inter-religious conflicts and wars. Second, that the Assembly serve the world by becoming a cooperative community of religions. It will hopefully agree upon and make resolutions calling religious people to practical action, encouraging all people to live by God-centered values, and fostering the development of human minds and spirits. Third, that the Assembly develop into an organization in which the major leadership of all religions participate. The Assembly has to lift up the highest values and purposes of life and offer them to all religious people, all groups, and all nations. Only in communion with the Absolute and with love for one another can individuals, groups and nations prepare for and become a part of the Kingdom of God on earth. I hope all of you, as representatives of your religions, find spiritual unity that can be the foundation for a bright future and for a new religious reformation that can lead the world. Through presentations and discussions, during plenary sessions or in committee, in artistic performance, meditation and prayer, please respect each other’s faiths and contribute as much as possible to the harmony of the whole. Let us all march forward to fulfill the world-historical mission of religions, that is, the realization of God’s will on earth”.

Goodwill messages were delivered in support of the initiative by the director general of the National Orientation Agency, Mr. Mike Omeri, and Mr. Izi Faafa, executive assistant on intergovernmental affairs to the senior special assistant to the president on youth and student matters.



The assembly also featured presentation on the teachings of Eckankar and the UPF principles of peace, which was delivered by Dr. George Ikpot. Participants spoke positively of the religious youth initiative and the UPF principles for peace and resolved that similar assemblies should be convened on a monthly basis for religious youth leaders, since Nigeria is facing serious interreligious relations challenges.

A special presentation on the UPF Nigeria Religious Youth Initiative was presented by Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, secretary general of UPF-Nigeria, which featured the need for the religious youth assembly and an introduction to Religious Youth Service. Participants were introduced to Religious Youth Service as a project of the Universal Peace Federation. At the end of the presentation, a special committee of representatives from the various participating religions was formed to promote the idea of Religious Youth Service projects in Nigeria. After thorough deliberations on the presentations at the assembly, participants endorsed the following proposals:

There is an urgent need for the establishment of a federal ministry for interreligious affairs and the creation of a National Assembly committee on interreligious affairs to respond to religious issues.

The Federal Government of Nigeria should be commended for the establishment of the national mosque and national church in Abuja. However, there is a need to provide a platform for the recognition of the voices and activities of other religious groups in Nigeria, and a national interreligious center should be established in Abuja and each state of the nation as a place of worship for all religious groups.

The Ministry of Education should work with the Universal Peace Federation to develop a national curriculum on interreligious education for families, schools and worship centers.

To complement the efforts toward promoting national unity and integration through the National Youth Service Corps scheme, the UPF initiative of Religious Youth Service should be promoted and adopted by the religious institutions in Nigeria as a platform for religious youth to serve their communities and the nation, and the government should consider integrating the Religious Youth Service scheme into the National Youth Service Corps scheme.

There is an urgent need for the establishment of a national interreligious youth council as a lower chamber for religious youth leaders' engagement, which can complement the present efforts of the National Interreligious Council (NIREC), which has no youth representative at the moment.

A formal request should be made to the federal government of Nigeria to look into promoting interreligious pilgrimages and sponsorship of religious youth leaders to participate in interfaith peacebuilding courses at the Unification Theological Seminary, an institution established by the UPF founder to train interreligious leaders.



All religious groups in Nigeria should be mobilized to participate in the 2015 World Interfaith Harmony Week. Participants also expressed concern about the increasing wave of religious extremism and called on all religious youth in Nigeria to embrace dialogue as a strategy for resolution of conflicts instead of embarking on violent killing of fellow citizens.

The assembly ended after the presentation of certificates to participants, who all pledged to serve as religious youth ambassadors in their religious groups and work with others in the days ahead to establish a national interreligious youth council to promote interreligious harmony and cooperation. The assembly was reported on the Radio Nigeria network news, the largest radio network in Africa.