

West African Youth Leaders Back Peaceful Nigerian Elections

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Abuja, Nigeria - Youth leaders from five West African nations came together to discuss upcoming elections in Nigeria.

The meeting, "Dialogue for Peaceful Elections 2015," was held by UPF-Nigeria's Office of International Affairs on Jan. 31, 2015, in the UPF Peace Embassy in the capital, Abuja.

The dialogue brought together youth leaders from Benin, Niger, Togo and Ivory Coast who are living in Abuja, as well as Nigerian youth leaders. In addition to discussing the Feb. 14 general elections of Nigeria [rescheduled for March 28], the meeting focused on other issues of contemporary relevance to young people in West Africa.

In his opening address Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, secretary general of UPF-Nigeria, thanked the embassies of Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast and Togo for responding to the invitation. "The dialogue program is designed to add the voices of young West Africans in Nigeria to the increasing appeal for the peaceful conduct of elections in Nigeria," Dr. Oko said. "It is our opinion that the forthcoming elections in Nigeria will contribute seriously in defining the new future of Nigeria. Being aware that Nigeria hosts the headquarters of ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States] and in recognition of the role of young people in West Africa, we believe that your participation will add value to this effort. As we have begun here, we propose dialogue for elections and not debates over elections, as we are all brothers and sisters."

Dr. George C. Ikpote, the executive director of the UPF-Nigeria Office of International Affairs, gave an introduction to UPF and the activities of the Office of International Affairs, including embassy relations, United Nations international observances and the Nigerian Ambassadors for Peace in Diaspora Initiative. He also spoke of the desire to utilize the Peace Embassy as a center serving the needs of embassies in Abuja as well as ECOWAS, among others. He encouraged the participants to become more involved in UPF activities in Nigeria and in their home countries. He then shared with the participants the five UPF Principles for Peace.

Mr. Chabou Abdou delivered a goodwill message from the Embassy of the Republic of Niger on behalf of the ambassador. He expressed the appreciation of the ambassador and pledged the support of the government and people of Niger for the elections in Nigeria.



The Embassy of the Republic of Benin nominated three youth leaders to attend. The ambassador was represented by Mr. Daniel Moutouama, who also gave a goodwill message on behalf of the ambassador with a strong appeal to Nigerians to ensure that the elections are peaceful, as “any problem in Nigeria will affect all of us in West Africa.”

Participants discussed issues related to the forthcoming elections in Nigeria, and each person had an opportunity to reflect on the challenges as well as share experiences from their nation.

Among the resolutions made by the participants were the following:

- Nigerians need to be aware that the whole world is concerned about the upcoming elections in Nigeria, as their outcome will affect not only Nigeria but also all of West Africa and beyond.
- To call on all Nigerians and West Africans to offer special prayers for peaceful elections in Nigeria as well as strengthen institutions to promote a culture of peace in West Africa.
- Participants appeal to political leaders to explore ways of working together beyond political party affiliations and winners/losers of elections for the realization of peace and sustainable development of the nation.
- Participants called on Nigerians to massively participate in the elections and ensure that they are peaceful before, during and after the elections.
- It was agreed that follow-up programs will be designed to engage other young people from West Africa in Nigeria as well as to consider UPF proposals for international marriages among West Africans to commemorate the 40th anniversary of ECOWAS.

The event ended with closing prayers for peaceful elections in Nigeria and for the unity of West Africans.