

Interview of Katherine Rigney UPF's Africa President

Yun Ki Choi
March 25, 2016



[Newsis]

Katherine Rigney UPF Africa President: “I delivered the message of peace for 40 years with a heart of repentance”

Africa is called the ‘land of limitless potential’ as an undeveloped area with rich natural resources.

However, long periods of colonization by western powers, due to the crudely-drawn border lines, caused tribes, religions and ideologies to be mixed, thus plaguing the continent with a history full of conflict.

There is one person who has spread the message of peace in her slender body over a long period of 40 years on a dangerous continent, that is often referenced by words like “Terror,” “Dictatorship,” “exploitation,” and “civil wars.”

That is the African President of UPF, Katherine Harting Rigney.

We met President Rigney at the Lotte Hotel World in Jamsil, Seoul, on the 12th, and even almost at the age of seventy she came across as strong and passionate.

President Rigney exchanged her greetings by saying, “I have been to Korea 40 times. Every time I come, I think that it is a charming country, and that the people are warmhearted.”

The reason for her visit this time was to participate in the commemorative ceremonies that were to be held from the Birthday of Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han on the 13th (lunar, January 6th) to the 3rd Anniversary of Foundation Day on the 20th (lunar, January 13th) for eight days, hosted by the Universal Peace Federation and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

President Rigney was born in 1946 into a white Catholic family in Saint Louis, Missouri, in the United States. She graduated from a Catholic high school, and from 1964 worked as a ground crew member for American Airlines and Delta Airlines.

And then in the year of 1969 the life of this ordinary woman changed 180 degrees.

In that year, she encountered the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, and after being fascinated by the doctrines, she joined the church on the 23rd of December that year.

“At that time, the Vietnam War was going on and I was lost mentally, always seeking the truth. Then I

encountered the peace ideologies of Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han, and was finally able to feel joy.”

Later, after meeting her spouse through the “1,800 Couples Blessing” by Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han on the 8th of February, 1975, she was sent to the Republic of Benin in West Africa as a missionary, on the 15th of May that year. However, in the same year she was arrested by a Communist regime that opposed the religion, and was then deported to Nigeria.

To the question of “Were you afraid when you were arrested by the Communist regime?,” President Rigney shook her head and said, “Never.”

She said, “Even if I had to hide with tension in my heart and be martyred after receiving unmitigated persecution, I would have been happy to be able to deliver the message of love and peace by Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han to the people of Benin. But at the time, I was deported, and unable to even reenter the country. I was in despair that I missed such an opportunity.”

President Rigney experienced a desperate situation, but did not throw away her dream of being a missionary in Africa. In fact, she wanted an opportunity even more earnestly. Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han valued such wishes, and appointed her as a missionary of the Family Federation in the Ivory Coast in 1976.

She absorbed herself in her missionary work with a heart of repentance toward the African people who had scars from the slave trades and colonization by white people, and as a result, was able to expand the size of the congregation.

In 1978, she became the President of the Ivory Coast Family Federation, and took charge of West Africa for the Family Federation in 1979. After moving on to becoming the President of the Nigeria Family Federation in 1991, she took on the heavy responsibility of being the Continental Director of Africa for the Family Federation in 1995.

“White,” “Female,” “Family Federation Missionary”... There was nothing that matched with Africa. As a result, it was that much more difficult; but President Rigney won the hearts of the African people as one of her vocations.

To the question of “Did you ever think of moving to another safer and more peaceful region?,” she said, “I have never thought that way.” Furthermore, she asked back, “In fact, I was grateful to Reverend Moon and Dr. Han for giving me a troubling and difficult path to walk on, and put even more effort into spreading their words. Where would I go without the bright smiles of the Africans, who were slowly opening up their hearts that had been closed so tightly, and who were accepting our messages with kind and pure hearts?”

However, the time for her to leave Africa has arrived. She contracted Malaria in July, 2000, and returned to America to receive treatment. It had been 25 years since she was sent to Benin as a missionary.

After regaining her health, President Rigney returned to Africa in the year of 2002, just two years later. She went there as the person in charge of the AIDS Prevention Education Program by the Universal Peace Federation.

She looked back, “As a member of the Family Federation (believer) that values family and purity very much, the activities to prevent AIDS was really meaningful to me.”

After being appointed by Reverend Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Han Ja Han as a representative to tour the world for families centered on the blessing in November, 2009, she became the President of African Regions for the Universal Peace Federation in June, 2012; and not only served as a missionary for the Family Federation, but also led the way in planting the seeds of peace on the continent of Africa, where poverty, disease, war and terrorism had been pressing down on the people.

“Many people think of Africa as a dangerous place, but that is not true. In fact, Africa is a place that needs and even craves love and peace. If we were to just look at Africa with a more affectionate view, then we would be able to see that it is not a strange land. I truly thank Reverend Moon and Dr. Han for giving me such a mission, and I plan on putting even more effort into blossoming their dream.”..