

Abuja hosts 'Golden Rule' conference on unity, peace

By Amina Alhassan

On December 2, 2017, the city of Abuja hosted the first Golden Rule conference at Merit House. The conference, which sought to discuss the peace and unity of Nigeria and other countries, was organised by the United Religious Initiative (URI), West Africa, in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Nigeria.

The inaugural peace summit came in the niche of time to deliberate on how to explore and sustain peace in communities, as well as put policies into action. The basic principle of the Golden Rule is to make you treat others the way you want to be treated, which all religions preach.

Distinguished speakers and panel discussants graced the occasion, which also featured research and networking opportunities. After this, the Abuja Declaration on the Golden Rule was made.

In her welcome remark, the chairperson of the URI West Africa Advisory Council, Hajiya Amina A. Shuaibu, said the decision to organise the conference became necessary as a result of the increasing hate speeches, killings and destruction of properties worth millions of naira. She bemoaned religious intolerance and wars among the citizenry.

"As concerned citizens dedicated to ensuring peace in the society, we must act with more firmness against disunity and seek to promote values and principles that would ensure our unity as a people," she said.

She observed that the Golden Rule ideology had a major role to play in today's world. She also called on the people, irrespective of race, creed or ethnic background, to take the call for peace as a personal task.

In his opening remark, Elisha Buba Yero, a URI Global Council trustee, called on parents to take up the task of ensuring peace in the society. He said the family had laid the foundation of how children would grow up to tolerate or accept people in the society, especially when it comes to religion. He said gone were the days when children of different religions and cultures were allowed to interact freely with one another.

"Today's situation is different as



■ A group photograph of participants at the end of the conference

most churches and mosques have their various higher institutions, which in turn do not allow these children to interact with other religious believers, thereby giving room for intolerance and extremism. Until we allow our children to interact with the ideologies of others and understand that we all worship the same God but in different ways, inter-religious misunderstandings will always be an avenue for disunity," he said. He hoped the conference would provide solutions that would bring religious disunity to an end.

Delivering his keynote speech, Ambassador Mussie Hailu, URI Global Envoy and Africa Regional Director and Special Representative at the United Nations (UN) and Africa Union (AU), called on participants to reflect on the teachings of the Golden Rule as the pathway to building national cohesion, peaceful co-existence, harmony and human dignity. He emphasised that justice and harmony among different religions and cultures could be significantly enhanced by the teachings of the Golden Rule. "This way we can secure a better future for this generation and generations yet to come," he said.

Hailu said the Golden Rule was a way to disarm fear, open the world for better change and lay the foundation for lasting peace in any

society. "When each of us lives according to the principles of the Golden Rule in our daily lives, there will be peace and harmony in our family, community, country, and the world at large," he said.

Quoting Karen Armstrong, a religious scholar and founder of Charter for Compassion, he said the Golden Rule was not an option but a key to our common survival.

While calling on the



■ Amb. Mussie Hailu delivering his keynote speech

government to include the teachings of the Golden Rule in the school curriculum, he said, "For a culture of peace, inter-religious and intra-religious harmony, respect among nations and justice to prevail on earth, it is high time to promote the Golden Rule throughout the world and introduce it in the school curriculum as part of education for peace."

Another speaker, Prince Charles Dickson, the field officer of Nexus



■ Hon. Dooshima Uza, Special Adviser to Benue State Governor on Projects giving her remark at the conference

Fund, presented a paper on the role of civil societies and the Golden Rule. He questioned what was really on the minds of everyone. He said that one way or another, either directly or indirectly, many people have been unjust towards others, religiously, culturally or otherwise. He called on all to treat others the way they would want to be treated.

Also presenting a paper titled, Golden Rule: A Political and Economic Imperative, Dr. Raphael Ogar Oko, the secretary-general, Universal Peace Federation (UPF), said it was high time citizens stopped allowing politicians to take advantage of them, especially to cause disunity and religious wars for political gains.

During a general group work and presentations, participants were given the opportunity to contribute and make suggestions on resolutions. Some of the participants suggested that the Golden Rule should be translated into the three major languages for easy assimilation and understanding. Others said schools should be called upon to key into the Golden Rule by setting up clubs in that regard. They also suggested media campaigns involving religious bodies, governments, vibrant advocacy, as well as the need to establish a Golden Rule centre.

In conclusion, participants, who came from every part of Nigeria, pledged to live according to the teachings of the Golden Rule and ensure peace in their various communities.

"We commit to combating hatred, prejudice, as well as religious and cultural intolerance, which represent significant challenge to peaceful co-existence," the participants pledged, and called on the Federal Government to declare April 5 as a Golden Rule day.

Ambassador Hailu concluded by reminding the people that the world is changing continuously; hence we can neither remain where we are nor go back to the conditions behind us.

"We can only move forward, but not on the same path that has been leading us into war, conflict, violence, hunger, discrimination, poverty, disrespect and hate speeches. Let us be instruments of peace and living examples of the teachings of the Golden Rule."



■ Participants appreciating comments and contributions from Speakers



■ Participants listening keenly to presentations delivered by Speakers