

**Religious, Secular Leaders Call for New Attitudes,
Renewed Acceptance for a Healthy Africa
Second IFAPA Summit : Working Together for Peace in
Africa**

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- The Second Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) Summit opened here on April 21 with religious and secular leaders affirming the need for concerted efforts toward preventing conflicts and averting human-made catastrophes.

A “healthy Africa” cannot be achieved unless conflict and instability is resolved and prevented, said IFAPA convenor Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). He was delivering his opening address at the summit called to review IFAPA’s activities since it was launched in October 2002. Over 240 representatives of eight faith traditions drawn from all over Africa, as well as observers from Europe and North America are attending.

“In order to bring about a new Africa, we need new attitudes toward each other. We need new respect for and acceptance of each other as religious leaders. And we need to reduce the desire and pursuit of revenge in political life.” Religious leaders, he cautioned, cannot afford to be partisan.

Noko stressed that peace and stability were essential prerequisites for making progress in improvement of health and in environmental protection. Reviewing the situation in various African regions gripped by instability, tension and ethnic violence he insisted working for peace “is to work for the very future of the African continent and its peoples.”

He appealed to African religious communities to take up the ownership of IFAPA in order to intensify inter-faith delegation visits, exchange programs, crisis interventions, advocacy for peace and networking.

“The idea behind the inter-faith solidarity delegation visits was to engage African religious leaders in inter-faith solidarity actions across national

borders. What we [IFAPA] have achieved cannot be easily measured. But we have learned a lot from each other,” Noko said.

It was further suggested by Dr Usman Bugaje, chairperson of the House of Committee on Foreign Affairs in the Nigerian Federal Parliament, that consideration should be made to stigmatize religious leaders who were accomplices in fueling conflict.

In the summit’s keynote address titled, “Working Together for Peace in Africa,” - the theme of the Second IFAPA Summit – Bugaje, however, said the religious elite should be encouraged to open up and debate rigorously interpretations and positions, especially those with the potential to trigger conflicts either within or outside their communities.

Bugaje pointed out that although many conflicts evolved around power, wealth and religion it was important that “we look beyond the simple question of what causes conflict to the often more important question of ‘who’.”

But he also cited bad governance, misplaced values and lack of efficient communication as some of the challenges that precipitate conflicts. “We need to explore more effective and more robust means of communication across religions and cultures...such inter-faith summits are perhaps one avenue.”

In his statement of support to the IFAPA initiative, Mauritanian President, Maaouya Ould Sid’Ahmed Taya, emphasized the supremacy of dialogue between the leadership of Africa’s diverse religions and cultures as an effective way of preventing extremism and violence.

In a message conveyed to the summit's participants by the country’s commissioner for human rights, Mr Hamadi Ould Meimou, the Head of State noted that the IFAPA initiative provided “the world with an example of tolerance and reconciliation under religious and cultural diversity.”

“We don’t agree with those who consider international

terrorism as an aspect of fight between civilizations and religions... The phenomenon of terrorism is linked neither to a given religion nor to a definite culture,” Taya noted.

The challenge to religious leaders to provide positive and compassionate leadership was also stressed by Mr Olara Otunnu, the United Nations Under Secretary and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

Otunnu noted that many conflicts were created by leaders. “There is no room for indifference, there is no room for inaction. Religious leaders must highlight their role to prevent wars,” he concluded. (651 words)

(The LWF is a global communion of Christian churches in the Lutheran tradition. Founded in 1947 in Lund, Sweden, the LWF currently has 138 member churches in 77 countries all over the world, with a membership of nearly 66 million Christians. The LWF acts on behalf of its member churches in areas of common interest such as ecumenical and inter-faith relations, theology, humanitarian assistance, human rights, communication, and the various aspects of mission and development work. Its secretariat is located in Geneva, Switzerland.)