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The Conference facilitators distinguished honored guests, conference coordinator, host and organizers, our very distinguished youth leaders and participants from every walk of life who are attending the 2nd International Conference on Youth and Interfaith Communication, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I feel much honored and it gives me great pleasure to be given the opportunity again to deliver a keynote address at the opening of this conference as I did last year. As you may be aware, this is the second international conference on youth and interfaith communication and the theme of the conference is “Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue and Youth Participation.” The conference is a unique assembly of today’s young people who acknowledge the wisdom inherent in our world’s faith traditions and who seek to connect the past to the present in order to build a sustainable and peaceful future. This assembly has its broad subject as Youth and Interfaith Communication with the specific lesson as building bridges through interfaith dialogue and youth participation. I will like to use this opportunity to share with you some new understanding that can guide our discussions throughout the conference, and since it is “new”, it may not be the very conventional and usual way that keynote addresses may be. However, I will urge each of you to open up your heart and see this conference as an opportunity to become a new person, who will pioneer a new tradition in your family, community and in our nation and the world. We have gathered here to dialogue in the realm of interfaith relations not to convert from one faith to another, but to acknowledge my faith in other faiths and other faiths in my faith, and to listen to one another, learn from each other and grow together. We are here to respond to issues of our faith and the faith of others and not to react to them. So, I urge you to be sincere in your heart, honest with your head and committed with your hands in order for us to create a new realm of consciousness in our world at this threshold of the second decade of the new millennium.

This is one of the most contemporary issues of the present age and which will guide our collective aspirations for the future. As an interdisciplinary educator and teacher without borders, my calling and responsibility has provided me the opportunity to learn and to work with people from diverse religious groups as well as listened to various religious perspectives. More than ever before, I have come to the realization and deep appreciation with keen interest on the subject of interfaith communication and have always yearned to deepen by increasing and multiplying my knowledge as well as skills to facilitate interfaith actions. I have no doubt that

our meeting today is an opportunity to deepen our interest in interfaith communication, increase and multiply our knowledge of the subject matter as well as utilize our experiences here to ensure that interfaith communication dominates our thoughts, words and actions from now henceforth. It is my greatest prayers that this conference will enable us as participants to become more fruitful, increase and multiply and have dominion in all that we do. The conference has been put together for us to lay a strong foundation to promote interfaith dialogue and youth participation among young people from diverse religious groups as well as create a unique platform for collaboration at all levels of the society, ranging from family, tribe, community, state, nation and the universe.

As I reflected on the theme of this year's conference, I think that we need to have a clear understanding of the issues involved, which include interfaith communication, interfaith dialogue, building bridges and youth participation. According to the United Nations, there are nearly 6.8 billion people who are living on earth today, spread across over 200 nations and affiliated with thousands of **religious denominations and ethnic nationalities**.

Despite these diversities, everyone without exception is seeking to attain happiness in life which involves internal satisfaction and external well-being and comfort. In other words, the Universal Common Factor (UCF) in all human beings is the search for eternal happiness. Therefore, we all seek for internal satisfaction and happiness in our mind as well as external comfort and happiness of our body. This means that all human beings have a common intention and aspiration but are expressed in various ways and forms. The invisible internal intentions are the same but the external expressions are different. This has led to conflicting expressions of common intentions and many have concluded that as there are different expressions, so are there different intentions. This is a fundamental lesson I have learnt from all the various ecumenical and interfaith activities and organizations I have been involved with. This misunderstanding has contributed to the many challenges confronting the world today and it is my desire that we return home with a new understanding.

To buttress further, the driving force for all human activities is the desire for happiness and it has been communicated in diverse ways through words and actions between human beings and with all things of creation. Throughout history, human beings have come to develop several levels of faith in the possibility of achieving happiness life. This has led to the duality of faith, which involves:

- The intention of the faith (internal) revelation of the faith from one source in heaven
- The expression of the faith (external) ... observation of the faith by many sources on earth

As you may be aware, communication is a process of conveying an intention to be expressed. Ideally, communication involves conveying a vertical intention to be expressed horizontally and such intentions in forms of revelations are expected to become an observation. The process of communication involves the initiator/communicator, a medium/channel/tool and the receiver. Every communication process has a purpose which is expected to be realized by the receiver in order to bring joy and fulfillment to the initiator. So, communication is a means of sustaining relationship between a subject partner and an object partner by conveying the subject partner's thoughts/intentions to the object partner in words (spoken or written) and/or actions (one-to-one or one-to-many).

Faith communication simply means the conveying of an intention of faith which is expected to be adhered to faithfully and used to advance human desire for the actualization of happiness. In other words, faith communication involves:

- The intention of the faith (inner) and The expression of the faith (outer)

In the same manner, interfaith communication means conveying an interfaith intention for an interfaith expression by human beings in thoughts, words and actions.

Despite the common intention of all faiths in the world to advance the realization of human desire for happiness, the expression of the faiths have been in conflict and has consequently created several borders within the faith communities. Instead of becoming “believers without borders”, the nearly 6.8 billion believers in human happiness in the world have all become “believers within borders” and have limited their ability to actualize “happiness for all”. We find ourselves in a world with abundant resources but have very few who are living in extreme wealth and many are living in extreme poverty and hunger. We have very few who have access to qualitative education and many who are denied educational opportunities even with the basic requirements.

Today, our world has become the world of powerful men but powerless women beginning from God as a Father in Heaven and not a Mother, to universities issuing Bachelors/Masters degrees without Spinsters/mistress degrees and even in businesses where companies are registered as XYZ and Sons Company without any ABC and daughters company, and so on. The conflict in expression of faith has led to increase in death of children who deserve to be alive, reduction in maternal health with women losing their lives while bringing forth new life into the world. Furthermore, the ongoing world war between HIV/AIDS and human beings have moved in the direction of HIV seeking to be fruitful, to increase and multiply and to have dominion over human beings while human efforts are becoming fruitless, decreasing and dividing and being dominated as the faith based message of abstinence and faithfulness to one’s spouse is being eroded by “if you cannot, use condom”. Our environment which is supposed to shelter us have been grossly destroyed and abused with the attendant climate changes, floods and all kinds of unimaginable revolts by the resources for human welfare. The partnership between heaven and earth which was prayed for by all saints, sages, prophets, messengers, messiahs, great teachers seem far from realization and while there are many mansions in heaven, there are no homes on earth. The expected partnership between priests and the police/government to eradicate evil from our society remains an illusion as the priests are focused on ending sin and the police are fighting crime independently as well as the former’s economic tool is collection of tithe and the latter works to ensure that we pay our tax.

This is the consequence of our decision to focus more on the many expressions of the faith in happiness than a focus on the single intention of all faiths in happiness. We have become divided against ourselves, beginning from our mind and body and between men and women, parents and children, leaders and followers, nations are rising against nations and the world is headed against its Creator. There is a cosmic disconnect between and among human beings and the universe. Each being is living in isolation and cannot achieve happiness alone. We have all become independent beings (individuals, families, communities, nations and world). Our world has become independent of the Creator and the nations of the world have become independent of

each other. Within each nation, the states/provinces/regions are all seeking for independence as everyone is seeking for individual salvation and the destruction of others. Instead of realizing a happy heaven on earth, we are all living in a suffering hell on earth. There is a great disconnect among the human family caused by the faith divide.

What should be the new future of our world and what can be the greatest act of service to humanity and all creation? It will be the realization that human beings have a crucial role to fulfill in the ongoing effort to build God's "kingdom of happiness on earth and in heaven". The realization of this eternal mission for humankind is an interfaith responsibility and this is what all religious traditions have been seeking to fulfill. This implies that our different expression of faith in the names of denominations and religions are all co-workers for the same purpose. We have a common purpose but have created unfortunately different practices. I have also learnt from the various faith traditions that the basic life goals for all human beings without exception is to have faith in God as the source of happiness, collaborate with fellow human beings to expand the kingdom of happiness and utilize the resources in the world to ensure that all people live happily on earth. This means that for the original world of God's ideal to be realized, human beings need to be fruitful and faithful, to increase and multiply as human beings and to have dominion over all the things of creation. Therefore, the fundamental challenge humanity faces today has to do with the **interfaith divide in the names of religious denominations, which are simply external expressions of our common internal intention to advance human welfare toward eternal happiness.**

As I mentioned last year, this conference could not have come at a better time than now. Our world today more than ever before is faced with the challenge of overcoming the "faith divide" as the global citizenship consciousness is being advanced strongly through science and technology. Today, technology has used software and hardware to create harmony among scientists but religious people are not utilizing technology to advance religious harmony. We must realize that technology is not only the application of science but the utilization of religious and scientific principles expressed through the software and hardware components. What then should be the focus of the international conference on youth and interfaith communication? I believe that the theme "Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue and Youth Participation" aptly conveys the new future of our world and the task that we must seek to accomplish. Without doubt, there is the need to build the ultimate bridge, which opens the way for all people to travel transcending their faith, nationality or race on earth into heaven. The ultimate bridge is a bridge that can link all of humanity on earth to the eternal path of happiness. We are called to build the bridge from today's suffering world to tomorrow's world of eternal happiness. What is the distance between today's world of suffering and tomorrow's world of happiness? Is it about 1000 kilometers, 1 million kilometers or a trillion kilometers? How many hours will be involved in completing this task? Do you think it will be a 24 hour day or a thousand year day? I read from the Christian Holy Bible that a day is like a thousand year and a thousand year is like a day to God. Human beings have postulated that we have 24 hours in a day but God sees a thousand years like a day. We need to know this very clearly.

Let me re-emphasize this point again as I stated last year: "every religious group has the responsibility of building bridges that can open the blocked way that prevents the people from accessing God, visiting him in the morning, afternoon and evening as well as living with Him all

the time and even spending the Holy days and holidays with Him”. So, we need to build the bridge that will connect all of us to information, to each other and to resources. However, the question that this conference should also seek to address is to identify where the bridge building process begins. Let us remember the wisdom that a **“journey of a thousand miles begin with a step”**. We want to build bridges to connect all suffering people waging war against each other due to ignorance to enable them enter the realm of happiness and living in peace. That bridge from suffering to happiness, from humanity to God begins with each of us and to others and all things. We should begin and complete the bridge within us (God and our invisible mind on one hand, and between our mind and body on the other hand) and extend the bridge between each of us as members of a global family and to all things in the universe. We have the task of connecting our mind with our body, connecting men and women, parents and children, my denomination to your denomination and from your denomination to mine. We have to build the bridge from “my God” to “your God” and from yours to mine.

This bridge building has begun but never completely built and humanity has descended into a realm of confusion instead of the realm of effective communication with God, with one another and with all things. For this reason, ladies and gentlemen, throughout human history, many untiring efforts have been made to build that eternal bridge that links humanity back to the Almighty’s realm of happiness. Many saints and sages have appeared and attempted to build such a bridge and open the way for humanity to communicate without borders with the Almighty, among human beings and with all other beings. Genuine efforts have been made throughout history and as you may be aware, these have been the reason for the emergence of prophets, saints and sages, masters, the messiahs, the men and women of God, etc. As we have come to see, no one has completely built the eternal superhighway bridge that all people can walk, run or drive through from the earth to our eternal homeland, heaven. The roles of young people throughout history have been extraordinary in these attempts but unfortunately, their efforts have not brought the desired result. Who can take up this responsibility and bring this intention to realization? I believe that this is the calling for today’s young people who have emerged at the most advantaged era in the providence of restoration of the world. Young Adam and Eve were not clear enough of their role and consequence of their failures. Noah’s couple and their children were not sure what could have been Adam/Eve’s failure. Abraham’s couple with their children did not have access to information clearly communicated to them and I am not sure of the quality and quantity of information that were available to Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and his peers, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Malachi, John the Baptist and others about the past. I do not know how much information about the past was available to Jesus and how much of Jesus’ words and deeds were communicated to Prophet Mohammed and so on. Today, we live in an era where all the works of yesteryears are documented and we can learn from the past in the determination to build a new future. This is the reason that today’s young people need to be empowered, connected to information, to each other and to resources as they assume this age long mission unfulfilled until this day.

There is the lack of an effective communication strategy among the world’s religious traditions. Christians feel that they communicate with God, while the Muslims with Allah, and the African Traditionalists with the Almighty. This is why a conference of this nature provides us with the needed opportunities that awaken us to the importance of interfaith dialogue and cooperation among religious groups. According to Wikipedia (2010), the free online encyclopedia, “Interfaith

dialogue refer to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions and spiritual or humanistic beliefs, at both the individual and institutional level with the aim of deriving a common ground in belief through a concentration on similarities between faiths, understanding of values and commitment to the world". Many of us are very conversant with the quote from Professor Hans Kung, a professor of Ecumenical Theology and President of the Foundation for a Global Ethic: *"There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions"*.

Therefore interfaith dialogue is a very essential tool in addressing the challenges we have identified. The way to building the bridges to the realm of happiness begins with dialogue among the faithful. As people who are living in the age of conflicts in expressions of faith by the various groups we need to embrace dialogue on issues of faith. We have to apply the principle of dialogue to all religious traditions and work consciously to promote interfaith relations from the local to the global level. For this purpose, there is the need for the establishment of institutions and organizations that can promote and sustain initiatives for interfaith dialogue and communication.

More than ever before, we need to effectively communicate beyond our denominational interest and perspectives. It is my sincere believe that the lack of effective communication and the presence of disconnected bridges among religious people have been responsible for the situation of humankind, and we are living at the age in which we have to resolve the various inequities of the past and present ages and to establish a new world order for the coming age. Each group need to create an opportunity for a profound self-reflection and self communication with God as well as seek to learn how to effectively communicate with others.

It therefore means that now is indeed the time for interfaith dialogue and communication and no longer the era for "my salvation" but the world's salvation. Instead of imprisoning ourselves with issues of individual salvation and denominational interests, thereby limiting the presence of the Almighty God to ourselves and our denominations, this is the moment for a global declaration that God is the Parent of all people transcending their culture, community or economy. Let me therefore use this opportunity as the keynote speaker to emphasize the call on religious leaders to wake up and confront the challenges of injustice, corruption, extortion, abuse of human and material resources all around the world today. This is the time to establish interfaith communication network that will allow all people to communicate without borders. Humanity has entered a new age, a new era of interdependence of nations, and in fact the era of internationalism. This age must be guided by the principle of interfaithism and interreligiousness. Interreligious and International harmony are the most essential tools for addressing the many challenges that humanity face today.

So the time has come for us to seriously reflect and discuss on issues about our faith and focus more on our ability rather than disability. We need to focus on our common intention instead our different expression. For example, Wa, Zo and Bia are all different expressions in Nigeria but mean the same thing (come). Why should we divide ourselves on external factors instead of unite on internal values. I will like to propose for your deliberation in this conference on the possibility of the following:

- The creation of a Religious Parliament and the Federal Ministry for Interreligious Affairs to complement the current National Assembly and the Federal Executive Council.
- The introduction of a special Interreligious service scheme for youth leaders and young people of all faiths so that they work together in social actions beyond their denomination. This may lead to the establishment of an Interreligious Youth Service Scheme at national, regional and international levels.
- The development of a national, regional and international curriculum on Interreligious Education and the establishment of Interreligious Theological Institutions to train Interreligious Ministers. Instead of promoting “comparative religious study”, we may need to endorse “cooperative religious education”. It may even be necessary to consider the idea of some legislative efforts to promote the observation of a Global Interreligious Day (a day where all religious people can come together in recognition of the One God and a day to Honor and Appreciate the Work of God in the lives of men on earth). Such a day may be the first day of the year in every denomination and nations of the world.
- The introduction of Interreligious Ambassadors Program (IAP), who shall be men and women who have made concrete commitment to promoting interreligious dialogue and actions.
- The launch of an Interreligious Pilgrimage where various religious leaders can engage in spiritual exercises together and live to live together on earth as preparatory for life in the great beyond.
- The introduction of Inter Faith Football Association and in general Interfaith Sports Competition and Leagues among religious groups, among others.

I am very confident that the stage is set for the ideas to become a reality in our lifetime and we need to demonstrate the faith in God, in each other and in the availability of resources in the world to drive this vision home. I feel so convinced that through this conference, young religious educators and leaders who are gathered here today shall strive to become exemplary leaders who will know their God, know the God of others and the God of all things and will not only learn this fact but will internalize and pass on the precious and holy wisdom of their great religious traditions as well as lead lives of unselfish service to God and humanity.

On our part as an organization, we have been advocating for the ideas that I have shared with you and have been organizing periodic “Conference Of Religious Educators & Leaders (COREL)”. The inaugural COREL was held here in Jos some years ago and we focused on Peacebuilding in Nigeria. In the months of September and October 2009, we convened COREL in Abuja and have addressed the need for religious educators and leaders to work together to save Nigeria. Through this regular holding of conferences to bring religious educators and leaders together, we are striving to encourage interfaith dialogue and actions as well as facilitating the building of the eternal superhighway bridge that links the human family to God and together we can live eternally in peace.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we have no other option now that to learn and work together to create, develop and implement initiatives that promote interfaith dialogue and actions as well as establish a platform whereby the highest expressions of religious wisdom are brought together and offered as sustainable solutions to the world's most serious and urgent

problems facing us today. Today, I would like to ask you to participate in this conference with an open mind, willing to learn from each other and looking forward to taking actions that will bring the discussions to reality. Share your views honestly and respect the opinion of others too. Let us be humble in our attitude, honest in our knowledge and very careful of others in sharing our skills. Let us all work together to building the eternal and lasting bridge that connects all people to God, to each other and to the abundant resources of the world. I also feel that a conference of this nature and the attendant interfaith dialogue are a first step in realizing this goal of building bridges and mobilizing young people to participate for the sake of the over 6.8 billion people who are living on earth and the many billions in the spiritual world.

Finally, it is my very sincere hope that you will generously offer your own experience, wisdom and effort as well as share best practices from your faith with others as we all make a determination to work together to achieve the dreams of one global family under God characterized by peace and mutual prosperity contrary to the present state of extreme poverty by many and extreme wealth by a very few. I am also hopeful that the youth leaders and other participants here, who possess requisite knowledge, experience, and wisdom, and who are also in strategic positions can examine more deeply and present recommendations for implementing the proposals that I have shared with you today to promote interfaith dialogue and actions. Please, become interreligious and intellectual educators who can work together and make continuous efforts to facilitate the realization of interreligious harmony, cooperation and mutual prosperity a reality on Earth as it is Heaven.

I am confident that each of you will make a very wonderful and decisive contribution to the realization of One global goal of eternal happiness by building bridges across all faiths and nations through interfaith dialogue and actions. I will like to end this presentation from *Dr. Leonard Swidler's "The Dialogue Decalogue" Journal of Ecumenical Studies (1983)*

- Dialogue to learn, to change, and to grow, and act accordingly
- Dialogue to share and receive from others; Dialogue with honesty and sincerity
- Dialogue comparing ideals with ideals, and practice with practice
- Dialogue to define yourself and to learn the self-definition of others
- Dialogue with no hard and fast assumptions about someone's else's beliefs
- Dialogue to share with equals; Dialogue in trust; Dialogue with willingness to look at your own beliefs and traditions critically; Dialogue seeking to understand the other person's beliefs from within
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I pray in the names of all the great saints and sages, the prophets and religious leaders who have made efforts to realize the will of God and in the name of God that each of us, our families and our nations shall be blessed for this extraordinary commitment. May God bless the organizers and the participants in this great assembly too. Thank you very much.