



ABUJA, 21 - 22 NOVEMBER 2011

RELIGIOUS LEADERS' WORKSHOP ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

COMMUNIQUE

Nigeria marked this year's Day of Prayer and Action (DPAC) with a Religious Leaders' Workshop on Birth Registration from 21 to 22 November at the Rockview Hotel Royale, Abuja. The workshop was declared open by Mr Labaran Maku, the Honourable Minister of Information, following Goodwill Messages by the President of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs His Eminence, Alhaji Muhammed Sa'ad Abubakar III, Sultan of Sokoto; the President of the Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN), Pastor Ayo Oritsejafor; UNICEF Representative in Nigeria, Dr. Suomi Sakai; and the Director-General of the National Population Commission, Mr J.D. Zubema.

The workshop was attended by over 70 participants, including key Christian and Muslim leaders and scholars across the country. Papers were presented on the Facts and Figures of Birth registration in Nigeria, Challenges of birth registration at the community level, Culture and Religion as factors in community demand for birth registration, and Success Stories and Good Practices in Africa and Elsewhere, amongst other topics.

The Minister of Information, represented by Mr Peter Ogbonnaya, Director, Domestic Publicity, urged participants to help ensure that every birth is registered as this would contribute immensely to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

His Royal Highness, Alhaji Auwal Ibrahim, Emir of Suleja, who represented Sultan Abubakar III, pledged support of Muslim leaders for the government's drive to increase Birth Registration, while Barrister Albert Uko, CAN's Legal Adviser, who represented Pastor Oritsejafor, said CAN would ensure that churches support birth registration at community level.

Dr. Suomi Sakai, UNICEF Representative, asked religious leaders to support birth registration because they conduct the naming and baptism ceremonies of Nigerian children and they enjoy the trust of their parents and their communities at every level. Director-General, National Population Commission, Mr J.D. Zubema, said the Commission will take all necessary measures in place for a successful collaboration with religious leaders to increase the country's low birth registration rate for children under five years which currently stands at a mere 30 per cent.

In the course of the workshop, participants identified opportunities open to the two religious communities for the achievement of a wider coverage of the birth registration exercise, some of which include

presentation of birth certificates before wedding solemnizations, child baptisms/dedications, as well as naming ceremonies, religious festivals, sermons during Sunday worship and Friday Prayers as well as the various administrative structures of the two religions – CAN and JNI.

Based on the above, participants resolved as follows:

1. To engage in intensive sensitization campaigns to their respective communities.
2. To work hand-in-hand with NPopC offices for the success of the birth registration exercise nationwide.
3. That NPopC should make birth registration materials available to religious groups to enhance the success of the programme.
4. Recommend the recruitment and training of *ad hoc* staff/volunteers to help in the sensitization and birth registration process.
5. Recommend to NPopC to increase the number of registration centres close to churches and mosques.
6. Recommend the establishment of functional publicity and monitoring committees in all the Local Government Areas.
7. Step up advocacy visits to Governors, State and national legislators, religious leaders and traditional rulers.
8. Recommend that a letter be written from the national headquarters of NPopC to state offices introducing participants at this workshop for greater and more effective collaboration.
9. Call on government at both Federal and State levels to adequately fund the activities of NPopC for a successful birth registration exercise in Nigeria.

Participants, in closing, commended the Federal Ministry of Information, The National Population Commission and UNICEF for organizing this highly educative and informative workshop and urged them to step up the tempo to ensure more is done in due course to achieve wider birth registration coverage.

Signed:

Alhaji Bala Ahmed
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Chairman, Communiqué Committee

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