



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

**Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue:
*Working together for our common future***

**Palais des Congrès, Marrakesh, Morocco
13–15 June 2023**



Kingdom of Morocco

The Parliament

REPORT

PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

MARRAKESH, 13–15 JUNE 2023



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Inaugural ceremony



From left to right: Sister Agatha Ogochukwu Chikelue (Chair of the Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee), Mr. Duarte Pacheco (IPU President), Mr. Rachid Talbi El Alami (President of the Chamber of Representatives of the Parliament of Morocco), Mr. Naam Miyara (President of the House of Councillors of the Parliament of Morocco), Mr. Martin Chungong (IPU Secretary General)

The inaugural ceremony of the First Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue was held in the *Auditorium des Ministres* of the *Palais des Congrès* in Marrakesh, Morocco, on 13 June 2023.

Mr. Rachid Talbi El Alami, President of the Chamber of Representatives, read a message from His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, in which he noted that the Conference was, for the first time, bringing together parliamentarians, religious leaders, scholars and experts to exchange views on the important issue of interfaith dialogue. Humanity was facing not so much a clash of religions or civilizations, but a “clash of ignorances”. The Conference must put words into action, revisit the concept of interfaith dialogue and improve collective awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence and of the perils represented by fanaticism and introversion. The IPU should set up a mechanism to make interfaith dialogue a common goal for the entire international community.

Building on its centuries-long history of religious and cultural diversity and pluralism, Morocco was keen to remain a model State, in which the followers of different religions could coexist in an environment of fraternity and security. His own belief in the importance of coexistence and dialogue was second only to his commitment to moderation and tolerance, and to the rejection of all forms of prejudice, hatred and extremism. He welcomed delegates to Morocco and wished them every success in their deliberations.

A short video was played, highlighting how Morocco celebrated diversity on a daily basis and encouraging participants in the Conference to break down barriers and build bridges between peoples through interfaith dialogue in order to advance collectively towards a better future.

Mr. Duarte Pacheco, IPU President, said that the world was facing many conflicts and suffering from a crisis of solidarity. Parliamentarians and religious leaders had different mandates but shared the common goal of serving their communities, promoting well-being and working for social justice and peace. The Conference had brought together a truly diverse group of people to engage in meaningful dialogue, anchored in a respect for human rights and a desire to create a world in which no one was left behind.

Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General, said that the IPU had a long history of promoting dialogue and conflict resolution, using parliamentary diplomacy to work towards more peaceful and democratic societies with strong institutions and values. He introduced part one of the [Parliamentary report on religion and belief](#), and invited those present to share their own experiences, which would be included in the second part of the report, due for publication in 2024. Emphasizing that interfaith dialogue could be an important enabler of peace, he encouraged delegates to build on what they had in common, namely a shared belief in human dignity, in order to secure a peaceful, inclusive and just future for the next generation.

Sister Agatha Ogochukwu Chikelue, Chair of the Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee, said that the world was at a turning point, having witnessed the tragic consequences of collective failures to prevent violations of human rights and uphold the rule of law. Africa was carrying the greatest burden of the world's social vulnerabilities and needed global attention for the ultimate good of humanity. Religions for Peace acknowledged the need to work with partners, notably governments and parliaments, as reflected in the subtitle of the Conference – *Working together for our common future*. Delegates needed to ensure that dialogue continued in the interests of respect for diversity, inclusion, trust, cohesion, peace and justice within and among all communities.

Mr. Ildephonse Niyokindi, Global Peacebuilding Officer, Tearfund Burundi, giving the first of two speeches from a youth perspective, spoke about losing his own mother due to conflict in his country, Burundi, and how it had inspired him to become a peacebuilder. He noted that, although different religions shared much common ground, the differences between them led to jealousy and mistrust. Religious leaders had considerable influence in their communities and it was vital for political leaders to engage with them. He called on both groups to use their influence positively and respond to the expectations of the population for a more peaceful world. People needed to be educated about peace and dialogue from an early age and the voices of young people needed to be heard in the decision-making process.

Ms. Heela Yoon, Founder and CEO, Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace Organization, giving the second speech from a youth perspective, reminded delegates that it had been almost two years since the Taliban regime had closed the doors of schools and universities to girls in her country. Millions of people had been killed in Afghanistan or had fled as a result of decades of conflict. Her organization had been able to support many families by engaging with all stakeholders in communities in the country and encouraging tolerance and listening. The religious and political leaders present at the Conference needed to provide more spaces for dialogue and increase the involvement of young people.



Mr. Ildephonse Niyokindi (Global Peacebuilding Officer, Tearfund Burundi) and Ms. Heela Yoon (Founder and CEO, Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace Organization)

Mr. Naam Miyara, President of the House of Councillors, welcomed participants to Marrakesh and officially declared the Conference open.

General Debate

On 14 June 2023, parliamentarians and representatives of religious and faith-based organizations participated in a General Debate entitled *Parliaments and religious leaders: Promoting dialogue, working together for our common future*.

A. General benefits of religious–parliamentary dialogue



Dr. Nazila Ghanea (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief)

There was widespread consensus that dialogue between and among religious and parliamentary organizations and practitioners was of great value, and that it could contribute significant benefits, both to particular groups and communities, and to society as a whole. Participants frequently called for such dialogue to be practised and promoted by international institutions, national parliaments, governments, sub-national entities, civil society, and individual citizens.

In terms of benefits, several speakers recalled the central role played by religious or faith-based organizations in reconciliation processes, from the restoration of good relations between individuals or organizations, to the prevention and resolution of large-scale or long-lasting conflicts.

Equally, many speakers posited that religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue contributed to increased levels of respect, tolerance, and understanding of others' perspectives within society. In turn, participants also felt that such circumstances tended to result in more resilient, peaceful, secure and prosperous societies, in which religious and other majority and minority communities could coexist cohesively, and where political, socioeconomic and other rights could be developed and improved for all.

Some argued that specific initiatives led by individuals or organizations engendered a sense of responsibility that helped prevent communities living in isolation from each other (including isolation from sub-sections of one's own community) and that encouraged the exchange and adaptation of ideas between different parts of society.

A few participants highlighted the value of various sorts of contemplation and prayer across different belief systems. Both religious and traditional leaders were also described as being able to provide useful longer-term perspectives during religious and secular debates relating to values and beliefs.

B. Proposals for action

Various participants advocated for specific actions to be taken that could strengthen religious–parliamentary dialogue and derive some of the benefits described above.

1. Harness the social advantages of religious or faith-based organizations

Parliamentarians and religious or faith-based organizations should jointly raise awareness of, harness, and fully utilize the advantages that such organizations bring to societies, including as: **a repository** of wider spiritual insights into fundamental concepts and long-standing traditions; **networks of specialist expertise** and experience; **a route to reach out** to and understand the needs of marginalized groups in society; **advocates for social change** with a range of viewpoints that should be meaningfully considered at the consultative stages of policymaking and legislative

work; **proactive service providers** to wider society including in education, care of the elderly and vulnerable, and in humanitarian work; **partners ready to share burdens** and tackle cross-cutting challenges, such as climate change and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Enable people to enjoy their rights in a tolerant society

Parliamentarians and religious or faith-based organizations should work in partnership so that citizens can exercise their universal and fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of religious or faith-based expression, human dignity, and a life under the rule of law. That partnership should also allow citizens to live in a culturally plural, inclusive, diverse and tolerant society, where all members are represented and listened to, including minorities or marginalized groups. To realize those partnerships, MPs and religious or faith-based organizations should combine their respective strengths, including legislative and oversight powers, moral guidance, and the chance to convene and find common ground between those with opposing views. Some speakers felt that the global situation called for the continued generous resourcing of legislative activity to promote freedom of religion and prevent anti-religious hate speech. Such legislation should include provisions to discourage any religion from discriminating against or marginalizing another, as well as guarantees for religious minorities to be able to live peacefully, including in countries containing large religious majorities.

3. Implement existing plans; devise and implement new projects

To translate general statements into concrete actions, MPs and religious or faith-based organizations should individually and collectively devise roadmaps for rolling out and implementing current plans relating to religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue. These roadmaps should set out how to make a reality of relevant resolutions of the IPU and the United Nations, G20 initiatives (such as the 2022 Bologna Conference), Council of Europe declarations, and the recommendations of other interfaith conferences, whether international or local.



A member of the Palestinian delegation watches the General Debate

4. Establish permanent structures and regular follow-up

a. The IPU should establish an institutional mechanism that would monitor delivery of the Marrakesh Conference outcomes and eventually become part of the IPU's regular work programme. The IPU should also ensure that it: maps best parliamentary practices about religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue; develops guidance on such dialogue; and supports the formation of regional parliamentary networks designed to advocate for freedom of religion and the prevention of anti-religious hate speech, through meetings, knowledge-sharing and capacity-building among network members.

b. To increase the consistency of religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue over time, bodies or initiatives should be established that could: promote the peaceful coexistence of different social groups; facilitate regular consultation and coordination across society through religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue; and enable joint initiatives, capacity-building and resource-sharing. Some speakers suggested MP-only structures, such as parliamentary committees or caucuses, or amending MPs' responsibilities under their internal Codes of Conduct to include duties relating specifically to religious–parliamentary

and similar types of dialogue. Others advocated hybrid bodies comprising parliamentarians and representatives of religious or faith-based organizations, which could be consulted during relevant policymaking, legislation or implementation activity. Ongoing parliamentary diplomacy was also identified as a powerful tool in this regard.

5. Educate and raise awareness

Awareness should be consistently raised about religious, faith-based and cultural diversity. Such work should begin in the early years of formal education and continue throughout all adult continuing education, as well as through public communications campaigns by local and national authorities.



Ms. Deepika Singh (Associate Secretary General, Religions for Peace) and Sister Agatha Ogochukwu Chikelue (Chair of the Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee)

C. Complementarity

While making the proposals outlined in section B, many speakers also discussed the complementary nature of the work of parliamentarians and religious or faith-based organizations. They noted that the additional strength and well-being of a country that could derive from good communications between MPs and religious leaders was contingent on three factors. MPs and religious or faith-based organizations should first understand each other's strengths and limitations. They should then use that understanding to join forces in the most effective way. And as a result, a powerful alliance of mutual assistance could ensue, with the capability of promoting understanding, cooperation and a sense of shared humanity.

To exemplify these points, some speakers pointed to parliamentarians' access to national levers of power, or the focus of MPs on the practical and material well-being of their constituents, alongside the complementary facets of religious or faith-based organizations, which included: a proximity to their adherents' personal and private lives; long experience in tending to their moral and spiritual concerns; and the power to unite and mobilize communities around a given goal through a sense of shared identity and values.

More unity than difference

Other speakers posited that, despite sometimes high levels of outward difference between religious and parliamentary groups, their core objectives tended to be similar. For example, participants suggested that both groups aimed, or should aim, to prevent hatred, reject bigotry, promote tolerance and inclusive institutions under the rule of law, develop community cohesion, and support peace at all levels, among others.

A number of other participants felt that the scale and globalized nature of the challenges facing many countries meant that complementary working and close partnerships between religious and parliamentary institutions and individuals were nothing short of a requirement of contemporary life. It was therefore crucial that religious or faith-based organizations were consulted alongside other parts of civil society during policy and lawmaking processes.

D. Sharing good practices

In addition to advocating specific and complementary actions such as those above, many participants explained their own country's good practices in fostering religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue. This allowed fellow participants to consider the potential for adapting such practices to their own needs and context.

1. Bodies and representation



H.H. Dah Couchoro Balogoun, President, National Voudon Council of Benin

Speakers described a range of governmental and parliamentary bodies mandated to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue in their countries. These included: a ministry of religious affairs; parliamentary committees tasked with fostering religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue; and a number of interfaith councils set up outside parliament, but with parliamentary involvement.

Other participants noted that, in their countries, seats in various legislative or consultative bodies were specifically reserved for representatives of certain religions.

2. Constitutional, legal and acknowledged rights and freedoms

Speakers recalled the rights enjoyed by citizens of their countries to freedom of religious expression, including the right to worship freely, establish religious or faith-based organizations, and provide religious education. These rights were variously enshrined in national constitutions, guaranteed by national or sub-national law, or recognized by declaration or convention.

Other participants outlined their countries' laws that separated the State from any religion or faith, and which helped ensure the equal treatment of all religious or faith-based organizations.

3. National and international declarations and agreements

Delegates presented agreements and declarations instigated by their countries' governments about promoting religious or cultural diversity, or about tackling religious or faith-based discrimination.

4. Conferences, meetings, action and initiatives to promote interfaith dialogue

Participants described a range of such work in their countries, including: building faith-based centres of excellence and research facilities; preserving religious and related monuments; advocating for policy or legal changes to religious or faith-based areas of public policy; commissioning and disseminating relevant research, opinion polling and expert-authored or peer-to-peer toolkits to support religious–parliamentary and similar types of dialogue; running public

awareness campaigns, often in conjunction with religious festivals or national days of celebration; commissioning religious or faith-based organizations to deliver outreach services to minority communities, and provide domestic and international humanitarian support; governments committing to involve religious or faith-based organizations in public consultations and other elements of national decision-making.

A few participants called for the international community to take action in response to alleged violations of universal rights and freedoms taking place in their countries as well as in other countries.



A side event on 'Our Common Future' organised by the Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars.

High-level panel 1: Working together for the promotion of the rule of law: Good practices and challenges



Left to right: Dr. Fadi Daou (Executive Director of Globethics), Ms. Fernanda San Martin Carrasco (Director of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief), M. Michael J. Stott (Senior Revisor IPU), Dr. Nazila Ghanea (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief), Ms. Meritxell Batet (Speaker of the Congress of Deputies of Spain), Mr. Bahouba Norbert Tankoano (Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel Interparliamentary Committee), Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen, and Salahuddin Barakat (Co-founders Amanah organization, Sweden)

The first high-level panel, moderated by Dr. Nazila Ghanea, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, discussed *Working together for the promotion of the rule of law: Good practices and challenges*. Panellists agreed that the rule of law runs counter to any arbitrary exercise of power and calls for the accountability of all institutions, individuals and groups to the same standard. The rule of law also assumes adherence to international law and human rights standards.

The first panellist, Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, Secretary General of the World Evangelical Alliance, said that religions and beliefs played a fundamental role in setting moral standards alongside the rule of law. He also highlighted the challenges in successfully legislating to allow freedom of religion or belief.

Secondly, Dr. Fadi Daou, Executive Director of Globethics, said that the rule of law was the basis for peaceful societies but was not enough on its own. The world was facing a crisis of mistrust and the challenge for both religious leaders and politicians was to rebuild their ethical authority. Laws could protect freedom of religion or belief but societies needed to believe in their added value for the common good.

Next, Ms. Fernanda San Martin Carrasco, Director of the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief and former Member of Parliament in Bolivia, explained that her organization supported MPs in their own initiatives to advance the human right of freedom of religion or belief. She noted that building democracy was the joint task of politicians and civil society and that it was vital to nurture cooperation between the actors from different religions and beliefs around the world.

Ms. Meritxell Batet, Speaker of the Congress of Deputies of Spain, said that the rule of law enabled peace and coexistence in communities. The State was responsible for protecting the community and needed to work with religions or beliefs to do so, while remaining impartial. The law also needed to protect religious freedom, giving people the space in which to grow and prosper, and to counter discourses of hate and discrimination.

Mr. Bahouba Norbert Tankoano, Executive Secretary of the G5 Sahel Interparliamentary Committee, spoke about how the rule of law provided a framework in which everyone was treated on an equal footing. Parliaments had an important role to play in promoting and preserving the rule of law, particularly amid security crises such as in the Sahel. Interfaith and intra-faith dialogue could foster development on a global scale.

The final panellists were Imam Salahuddin Barakat and Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen, the co-founders of the Amanah organization in Sweden, which works to counter antisemitism and islamophobia. They spoke about the recent burning of the Qur'an in their country. Their organization was engaging with the Parliament of Sweden to find appropriate and even-handed solutions to this expression of hatred, calling for multiple lines of action not confined only to legal responses.

The discussion was then opened to the floor and participants spoke about the representation of different religions and beliefs in their parliaments or States, successes in building societies in which people of many religions and beliefs lived in harmony, the role of global bodies as forums for interfaith dialogue, and the importance of religious education. Participants also highlighted good practices with regard to youth issues, responses to blasphemy, the blessings and burdens of diversity, the necessity to include non-believers and non-citizens in dialogue, and the recognition and registration of religion and belief communities. All participants agreed that parliamentarians had a responsibility to uphold the rule of law and that the cooperation of parliaments with religious leaders and civil society was beneficial.



Mr. Bahouba Norbert Tankoano, Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen, Imam Salahuddin Barakat

High-level panel 2: Promoting regional and global peace through intra-faith dialogue



From left to right: Mr. Hayder Al-Khoei (Director, Al-Khoei Institute), Senator Garret Ahearn (Member of the Oireachtas of Ireland), Dr. Sarah Markiewicz (Interfaith Advisor, IPU), Dr. Ahmad Abaddi (Secretary General, Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars), Ms. Tulia Ackson (Speaker of the National Assembly of the United Republic of Tanzania), Ms. Ligia Matamoros (Latin American Catholic Episcopal Council), Senator Farook Hamid Naek (Member of the Parliament of Pakistan)

The second high-level panel, moderated by Dr. Ahmad Abaddi, Secretary General of the Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars, discussed *Promoting regional and global peace through intra-faith dialogue*. As a starting point, the panellists agreed that, on the one hand, religious texts were a valuable resource to guide responses to the major challenges facing the world, but on the other hand could be interpreted in toxic and venomous ways, leading to tensions within religions and beliefs. Intra-faith dialogue represented an opportunity to build bridges within religions and beliefs to counteract these extremist interpretations.

Ms. Tulia Ackson, Speaker of the Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania, spoke about the contrast between traditional views and the more inquisitive outlook of the younger generation within certain religions and beliefs. The United Republic of Tanzania had established interfaith committees at the national and local levels, but these also served as forums for intra-faith dialogue. She also noted that societies were not homogeneous, and care should be taken to understand that non-believers also had an influence on the discourse on religious issues.

The panel also included Senator Garret Ahearn from Ireland, who explained how intra-faith dialogue had been key to the Northern Ireland peace process. Religious leaders had firmly rejected the idea that different faiths represented a hierarchy of humanity, which had created a foundation for political discussions. The Parliament of Ireland held regular events for representatives of all faiths and churches for consultation on public policy. Ireland also had policies to encourage immigrants to the country to integrate into society without relinquishing their cultural identity.

Senator Farooq Hamid Naek from Pakistan spoke about how intra- and interfaith dialogue could be used as a vehicle for regional and global peace, and highlighted how such dialogue had frequently offered solutions to conflicts which were not themselves triggered by religious divisions. Religious

leaders should recognize their role as the custodians of the shared values of all religions and refrain from promulgating messages of intolerance. The cooperation between parliamentarians and religious actors was a two-way street and presented opportunities to inform policymaking on the prevention of violence.

The fourth panellist, Mr. Hayder Al-Khoei, Director of the Al-Khoei Institute in Iraq, noted that sectarianism was as old as Islam itself. He encouraged religious and belief leaders to constantly reevaluate their traditions with a view to making it harder for extremists to hijack divisions for their own aims. Intra-faith dialogue was an opportunity to reach out to others and understand their fears, hopes and legitimate grievances. In Iraq, dialogue between Sunnis and Shi'at had begun as an exchange of angry recriminations but had blossomed into friendship.

The final panellist, Ms. Ligia Matamoros, a youth activist from Costa Rica, emphasized the need for solidarity within religions and beliefs to fight against broader injustices. People in religious communities were best placed to know their own needs and, in Latin America, there were countless examples of faith-based communities working to address subjects as diverse as environmental issues and health care needs. Religious communities should focus their work on vulnerable populations, including women, youth and the poor.

The discussion was then opened to the floor and participants spoke about: initiatives in their own parliaments and organizations to encourage interfaith and intra-faith dialogue; the importance of recognizing and accepting difference; the unique convening power of parliaments and governments; partnerships between secular and religious actors; the need to change mindsets and not just focus on legislation; the value of international agreements and declarations to build human fraternity; and the negative impact of damage to religious artefacts and cultural heritage. Participants agreed that peace could be achieved through dialogue; that harmony within religions was a prerequisite for good relations between religions; that most human values were common to all religions; and that broad-based religious education from an early age was essential for better understanding. Intra-faith dialogue involving parliamentarians, religious leaders, civil society, and particularly young people, was essential for the long-term stability of religions and beliefs. A calm and open-minded approach to dialogue was essential for identifying clear-sighted solutions. Security and stability were crucial to the well-being of all.



Panel 1: Religion and belief in different secular systems: Examples from around the world

The panel focused on the meaning of secularism in different parts of the world, discussing the relationship between States, parliaments and religious institutions, freedom of religion and belief at the national and international levels, and possible areas of tension.



Sister Liliana Franco (President, Caribbean and Latin American Confederation of Religious Women and Men) and Mr. Habibou Bako (Policy Officer, Search for Common Ground)

The main takeaways about the various examples of secularism around the world were:

- Secularism in Austria has helped ensure that migrant communities are protected and treated equally regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliation.
- Azerbaijan values diversity through funding the construction of mosques, synagogues and churches.
- In Argentina, the Constitution describes the links between religion and the State as positive and collaborative while also distinguishing between the two. Secularism in Argentina also means a wide recognition of religion individually and in communities, an acknowledgement of the autonomy of religious communities, and the independence of religions from the State.
- In Mali, secularism is enshrined in the Constitution, but interfaith dialogue, agency and inclusion are crucial to reduce misinterpretations, achieve peace and promote tolerance.

The discussion also identified the challenges ahead and the potential collective work required to address them:

- Antisemitism, nationalism and hate speech, which threaten security and peace. Parliaments can take concrete measures to combat these challenges by strengthening and implementing legislation protecting the rights of religious minorities.
- Religious conflicts as a threat to global security. Parliaments need to increase mutual respect and comprehension between religions to prevent such conflicts.

- Religion should be seen as a positive force that makes many contributions to the world. Diversity is a gift and unity must be a priority.
- Interfaith dialogue and consultation with various actors, particularly young people, are crucial to achieve peace.

The discussion concluded by reiterating that the objective should be to go beyond what was enshrined in fundamental laws and national constitutions. Parliaments must work towards creating a framework in which different communities could live peacefully together and must take advantage of the diversity of different religious communities to achieve social cohesion, respect and appreciation.



The Iranian delegation participated actively in conference sessions.

Panel 2: How can parliamentarians cooperate with religious communities and faith-based organizations to mobilize society for greater moderation, solidarity and inclusion?



Hon. Fiona Bruce (UK Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief and Member of UK Parliament)

The panel provided a space for a rich discussion between a wide range of actors, parliamentarians, religious leaders and practitioners, on how they could make the world a better place. Various projects from around the world were presented, which all had in common the aim of fighting fear of the Other and ignorance, and involved both faith organizations and politicians. The panel also discussed how faith-based organizations, religious leaders and politicians, as representatives of the people, could complement each other's work for the benefit of all, with examples of joint actions where faith-based organizations could help government to assist the most vulnerable and reach out to the most remote.

The main takeaways from this panel were:

- Trust is the main principle that guides dialogue and there cannot be any meaningful and constructive discussion or cooperation without it.
- In order to build trust, there is a need to create an environment of mutual respect, where values and principles of equality and inclusiveness, mutual understanding and solidarity are encouraged and upheld.

The panel strived to put the second of those points into practice. All panel members decided to sit among the other participants and speak from the floor, rather than from the podium. In doing so, they showed their readiness to engage in dialogue, to start on an equal footing and to take into account all voices.

Participants pointed out that, in a dialogue between parliamentarians and religious communities or faith-based organizations, everyone should be treated fairly, in the same way and no less favourably than others. All contributions mattered and should be heard, regardless of whether they came from the political or religious sphere.

Finally, participants also emphasized the importance of mutual understanding and solidarity. Parliamentarians and faith-based actors shared common challenges and common goals, but their approaches were different. It was essential to witness, understand and talk about each other's work to learn from it and share good practices.



Rabbi Tamar Elad-Appelbaum (Co-founder and Educational Director, Beit Midrash for Israeli Rabbis)

Panel 3: Clarifying the relationship between the rule of law and freedom of religion or belief to preserve statehood and citizenship



From left to right: Mr. Hatem El-Hady (Representative, Baha'i International Community), Senator Silvia-Monica Dinică (Member of Romanian Parliament), Dr. Leo Igwe (Board member, Humanists International), Ms. Boutayna Lamharzi (Human Rights Officer, IPU), Ambassador Mokhtar Omar (Senior Advisor to the Secretary General, IPU), Dr. Maryana Hynp (President, European Network on Religion and Belief), Dr. Alves Pinto (Lecturer in Legal Studies and Diplomatic Studies, University of Oxford), Reverend Elga Joan Sarapung (Director, Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia)

The panel discussed the relationship between the rule of law and freedom of religion or belief. First, the panellists and the moderator provided working definitions of these concepts.

The rule of law safeguards the social order so that all individuals in a given society abide by the same laws and benefit equally from their protection. The rule of law is therefore rooted in a social contract between members of a community – i.e. the *citizens*, in a broad sense. This idea contrasts with divine sovereignty, embedded in the notion of God's authority over creation. Freedom of religion or belief is a human right that should be respected regardless of an individual's religious adherence, country, gender, age, ethnicity, etc.

Difficulties can emerge at the intersection between the rule of law and freedom of religion or belief:

1. Where the expression of religion or belief based on divine sovereignty competes with other rights enshrined by the rule of law – including the freedom of religion or belief of other individuals – thus challenging the social contract.
2. Where authorities illegitimately seek to limit freedom of religion or belief, often targeting marginalized groups.

In these cases, the rule of law must be maintained to preserve the social contract from which statehood and citizenship derive.

The panel discussed situations in which those that do not share the religion of the majority had been persecuted. In that regard, upholding the rule of law to guarantee freedom of religion or belief was also critical to the realization of an inclusive interfaith dialogue. Intra- and interfaith dialogue should be understood as an exercise of equals in which multiple truths could coexist and in which one person's freedom of religion ended where another's began.

In conclusion, the panel agreed that the momentum should be sustained and encouraged all participants to engage in further dialogue. The panel also invited the IPU to consider the development of a self-assessment toolkit and model legislation for parliaments to gauge their religious sensitivity and uphold the rule of law, guaranteeing freedom of religion or belief for all members of society.

Panel 4: Different mandates, common goals: Religious actors and parliamentarians as allies for promoting gender equality and youth participation



Ms. Sabina Čudić (Member, International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief and Member of Parliament – Bosnia-Herzegovina)

The panel addressed the issue of *Religious actors and parliamentarians as allies for promoting gender equality and youth participation*. Panellists discussed existing barriers to the meaningful participation of women and youth and ways to overcome them, and also addressed cooperation between parliaments and religious actors to encourage this much needed participation.

The discussions emphasized the need for more and better education and faith literacy. Education was described as a powerful, if not the most important, tool for empowerment. Both politicians and faith-based organizations must be engaged and committed to establish frameworks and provide the necessary resources that would deliver strong education.

The panel also discussed the fact that participation by women and youth should not just be a passing trend but should lead to their active participation in decision-making. While quotas and nominations were a good idea on the surface, other good practices could be put into practice to start the ball rolling, namely:

- Reduce the age of eligibility so that Parliaments include more youth members (align with the voting age).
- Facilitate/advocate for more youth and women in leadership positions.
- Focus on issues that are of interest to youth and women to encourage them to engage.
- Encourage Parliament to set its agenda to include women and youth issues in broader policy areas.
- Address gender-based violence and sexism as well as youth exclusion within political parties themselves to change the culture of parliaments.

Finally, the participants in the panel discussion agreed that the active involvement of youth and women in politics would help rebuild trust in democracy and establish a more inclusive society.

Panel 5: Promoting trust and mutual recognition: Contributions of religious actors and parliamentarians to counter hate speech, incitement to violence and digital challenges to democracy



From left to right: Imam Salahuddin Barakat (Co-Director, Amanah Center, Sweden), Ms. Karen Bradley (Member of Parliament, United Kingdom), Dr. Ali Al-Nuaimi (Chairman, Manara Center for Regional Coexistence and Member of the Federal National Council of the United Arab Emirates), Ms. Nihal Saad (Director, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations), Ms. Laurence Marzal (Programme Officer, IPU), H.E. Emmanuel Adamakis (Metropolitan Elder of Chalcedon), Ms. Desi Hanara (formerly Southeast Asia Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief), Rabbi Moshe David HaCohen (Co-Director, Amanah Center, Sweden)

The panel tackled the issues of hate speech and violence and addressed the new digital challenges to democracy. Part of the discussion questioned the relationship between freedom of religion or belief on the one hand and freedom of expression on the other. Participants especially emphasized the necessity to rebuild trust, to promote education on these issues, and to advocate for constructive cooperation between parliamentarians and religious actors to counter narratives of hatred.

Throughout the discussions, participants acknowledged the main challenges posed by the new digital era, which was causing society to lose sight of solidarity and suffer from a lack of human interaction. The functioning of social media tended to amplify disinformation, misinformation and hate speech, which would have remained small-scale in a real-life setting. Anonymity on the Internet encouraged people to make statements that they would not have made otherwise.

Participants also proposed and shared recommendations to better address these challenges and be able to counter narratives of hatred. Acknowledging the lack of fruitful interaction between people, the panel emphasized the need to:

- Rebuild trust in each other and strengthen human ties by promoting values of solidarity and compassion
- Reflect on the notion of otherness and promote equality.

With regard to education, the panel advocated:

- Education to equip youth with critical thinking skills for them to be able to recognize and deconstruct hate speech
- Education on digital tools and the challenges posed by them.

To encourage constructive cooperation between parliamentarians and religious actors, the panel recommended:

- The participation of faith groups in helping parliaments to deliver policy aims
- That parliamentarians and faith-based organizations work together on global norms: establishing a clear and international definition of hate speech and making sure that Parliaments align their national legislation with international standards
- Bringing religious leaders into parliaments for hearings/advisory boards to influence legislation.

Panel 6: Legislators and religious leaders as bridge builders: Promoting rights and fundamental freedoms for more just and cohesive societies

The panel explored the different ways in which legislators and religious leaders serve as bridge builders between different sectors of society to promote the rights of all citizens. Based on the views of experts from the parliamentary and religious spheres and grassroots organizations, the panel discussed why legislators and religious leaders should work together and the benefits of doing so.



From left to right: H.H. Dah Couchoro Balogoun (President, National Voudon Council of Benin), Ms. Bani Dugal (Representative, Baha'i International Community), Mr. Abdulnabi Salman (Deputy Speaker of Majlis Al-Nuwab of Bahrain), Ms. Deepika Singh (Associate Secretary General, Religions for Peace), Mr. Mauricio Huertas Glauser (Political Affairs Officer, IPU), Ms. Heela Yoon (Founder & CEO, Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace Organization), Prof. Jorge Gonzalez (UNESCO Chair on Intercultural Dialogue, National University of Colombia), Ms. Aisha Adams (Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Malawi)

Legislators and religious leaders should work together to preserve fundamental freedoms and ensure the gradual development of societies. In Bahrain, cooperation and dialogue between legislators and religious leaders were essential in the drafting of legislation addressing the personal status and the economic situation of low-income households. In Malawi, religious leaders held legislators accountable when their political discourse turned into hate speech and they work together as agents for peace and stability. In Benin, legislators had ensured that religious communities could celebrate religious holidays according to their beliefs. Legislators are the interpreters of the heartbeat of their constituents, while religious leaders have the capacity to inspire their followers to achieve nobility. Together, they have a unique opportunity to restore trust.

However, for this cooperation to work, dialogue between legislators and religious leaders should be sincere, realistic and pragmatic. They should set aside their political and religious differences, as collaboration leaves no room for competition. Legislators and religious leaders should also shoulder their respective responsibilities whether they are in a secular society or not. Religious leaders should ensure that religious discourse is used intentionally and should remind all sectors of society that human existence is governed by social and moral laws of cause and effect. Legislators, on the other hand, should work with all religions, not only the ones they support or follow. Finally, legislators and religious leaders should ensure that their collaboration is inclusive and involves all relevant stakeholders, particularly women, young people, tribal leaders and minorities.

Legislators and religious leaders need to ensure that the basic requirements to include women, youth and minorities are met in order to enable these groups to participate in a meaningful manner in interfaith dialogue. At the international level, the flow of information needs to reach the local level. At the regional and local levels, the international community, State actors, and other relevant stakeholders should be encouraged to support local and regional coalitions, including those led by women and young people. It is also vital to empower women and young people as active participants in interfaith dialogue.

Closing session

At the closing session on 15 June 2023, rapporteurs from the two high-level panel discussions and six other panel discussions presented their reports.



From left to right: Ms. Ayantu Taye (Deputy Commissioner of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission), Ambassador Anda Filip (Director for Member Parliaments and External Relations, IPU), Mr. Martin Chungong (IPU Secretary General), Mr. Rachid Talbi El Alami (President of the Chamber of Representatives of the Parliament of Morocco), Dr. Ahmad Abaddi (Secretary General, Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars), Ms. Nihal Saad (Director, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations), Mr. Naam Miyara (President of the House of Councillors of the Parliament of Morocco), Ms. Deepika Singh (Associate Secretary General, Religions for Peace)

The outcome document of the Conference, the Marrakesh Communiqué (see [Annex](#)), was introduced by Ms. Ayantu Taye, Deputy Commissioner of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus Development and Social Services Commission, and Mr. Rachid Talbi El Alami, President of the House of Representatives of Morocco. The Marrakesh Communiqué was adopted by consensus by the parliamentarians present.

In closing remarks on behalf of the IPU President, Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General, thanked the Moroccan parliament, under the patronage of His Majesty King Mohammed VI, for its capable and generous hosting of the Conference. He also thanked the more than 700 parliamentarians, religious leaders and representatives of civil society, and especially the representatives of the IPU's partner organizations, who had made the Conference a resounding success.

He emphasized three messages he personally would be taking away from the Conference. First, that the protection of freedom of religion was a collective responsibility for all, including parliaments. Second, echoing the words of His Majesty the King of Morocco, that the world was experiencing a "clash of ignorances", which could only be addressed through respect and education about the Other. Third, that parliamentarians and religious leaders had many things in common, especially the goal of serving their communities to promote solidarity and equality, counter intolerance and uphold the rights of all.

Closing the Conference, Mr. Naam Mayara, President of the House of Councillors of Morocco, said that the message from His Majesty the King conveyed at the start of the Conference had been an illuminating introduction to the theme under discussion, emphasizing Morocco's longstanding commitment to peaceful coexistence and tolerance. Parliaments and religious leaders needed to recognize each other's influence and continue their constructive coordination on interfaith dialogue at a global level in order to continue the fight against discrimination and radicalism.

He thanked the many participants in the Conference, whose contributions had demonstrated the commitment of both the parliamentary and religious communities to interfaith dialogue, as well as highlighting the common ground on which they could build to advance such dialogue.

Marrakesh Communiqué

We, parliamentarians from around the world, have gathered with representatives of religions, beliefs, faith-based and civil society organizations, and international experts, at the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in Marrakesh, Morocco, organized by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco, in cooperation with Religions for Peace and with the support of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the Mohammadia League of Religious Scholars.

We affirm that interfaith dialogue that is grounded in support of fundamental rights and freedoms is an essential tool for promoting inclusivity and peaceful coexistence, upholding the rule of law and encouraging collective efforts to achieve a better society.



Representatives of Hindu and Sikh religions participating in the General Debate

While religions and beliefs of various types may inform us about the world and our fellow citizens, our first responsibility as legislators is to the people we represent, helping to secure the material circumstances of a good and healthy life for all. It is our responsibility to uphold the rule of law and all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (henceforth “religion or belief”), freedom of speech and freedom of assembly. We also affirm the importance of ensuring that such rights and freedoms are enjoyed by all, without discrimination.

As the world emerges from three years of pandemic, we are facing a surge in armed conflicts, geopolitical tensions and environmental degradation, which reinforce existing inequalities, economic instability and humanitarian crises. We are witnessing the shrinking of civic space, increasing ideological polarization and the growth of politically motivated violence in many contexts. Disinformation and hate speech are becoming more prevalent, often amplified by social media. Feelings of insecurity are high and citizens’ trust in their institutions is waning in many regions.

Intolerance towards minority or marginalized groups, including communities of religion and belief, is on the rise. These trends especially impact women, who already face challenges accessing equal rights and experience diverse forms of gender-based discrimination and violence, with religion or belief sometimes serving as a pretext. The voice of youth, a ballooning demographic, remains sidelined.

No religion or belief should be identified with the discrimination or marginalization of another community, nor should it condone violence against another community. We further reaffirm that terrorism and violent extremism, as major ills threatening peace and security, should not be associated with any particular religion, belief or ethno-religious community.

We highlight the importance of moderation when resolving religious or belief-based conflicts and the significant role of dedicated mechanisms or institutions for conflict and dispute resolution.

We further express our concern at the backsliding of the global state of democracy, the deterioration in human solidarity and the weakening of the moral compass in politics and societies at large that can be seen in countries and communities around the world.

Addressing these issues requires concerted and decisive action from all of us: from parliamentarians with their legislative power, as well as from all parts of society, including official institutions, religious and belief communities, faith-based and civil society organizations, and academia. Times of crisis and uncertainty especially call for solid leadership to bring people together around a common vision of the future.

We believe strongly in the need for a social contract that reinforces the common dignity, fraternity and equality of all. As parliamentarians, we share a commitment to building resilient societies in which all people feel equally included. We encourage a culture of dialogue in parliaments as an essential tool of peace and inclusion. We commit ourselves to respectful conduct towards all people, as well as to the avoidance of divisive rhetoric around religion or belief to serve a political agenda.

We acknowledge that leaders of religious and belief communities, including traditional leaders, are often influential public figures with wide outreach. Religious and belief networks transcend constituencies and national borders. They are often the first responders in emergencies and provide an important safety net to people in need. We are also deeply inspired by the many initiatives of religious and belief communities aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence and equal rights among all people.

Our work as parliamentarians can benefit from greater awareness of the influence and importance of religion and belief, and of their contribution to the welfare of humankind. We must engage these networks as allies in our common cause for social justice and coexistence.

Today, we add the voice of the parliamentary community to this call for coexistence, based on equality and dignity for everyone. We affirm our commitment to working together for peaceful coexistence, inclusion and strong institutions in full respect of the rule of law.

We encourage our parliaments to commit to carrying forward the following actions:

- Ensure that all religions, beliefs and faith-based organizations are treated equally and without discrimination under the law.
- Include representatives of religions, beliefs and faith-based organizations alongside other civil society representatives in all their diversity, in ongoing efforts to secure the implementation of national legislation and international commitments, and the promotion of social cohesion.
- Engage with religious or belief leaders and communities to help build solidarity and effectively address the major challenges of our time, such as poverty and inequality, climate change, conflict and war, as well as widespread addiction, overconsumption, and digital technologies, including the negative uses of artificial intelligence.
- Develop parliamentary groups or committees within national parliaments on interfaith and intercultural dialogue for peaceful coexistence and social inclusion, and enable cooperation between these groups or committees.
- Promote greater cooperation between religious and belief representatives and national authorities in combating crimes such as human trafficking, domestic servitude, domestic violence and forced labour, and protecting the victims thereof.
- Develop global parliamentary codes of conduct to ensure respect for the right to freedom of religion and belief and the prevention of hate speech.
- Promote, from an early age, the principles of inclusion and diversity, including education about the Other, as well as respect for all religions and beliefs, as the foundation of peaceful and inclusive societies.
- Advocate for public education and awareness-raising focused on promoting respect and understanding between individuals and communities across religions and beliefs, upholding the dignity of all.
- Resolve to counter hate speech or contempt for individuals due to their religious or belief affiliation, and robustly address discriminatory treatment, including through legislative initiatives.
- Encourage the IPU to map best parliamentary practices in support of diversity, tolerance and dialogue, upholding citizenship and the rule of law, and to provide guidance to parliaments accordingly.

- Encourage leaders of religions and beliefs to promote inclusivity, fundamental human rights and gender equality within their communities, in line with national legislation and international commitments.
- Deepen interaction with the United Nations, other international bodies and civil society, and explore avenues for the implementation of United Nations strategies and resolutions on interfaith and intercultural dialogue and to address implementation gaps at the national level.
- Ensure that national holidays and other official acts to commemorate occasions important to a religion or belief reflect the diversity of religions and beliefs in the country concerned.
- Establish an institutional mechanism within the IPU to build on the outcomes of this Conference, which would examine good practices, monitor progress and formulate proposals in this area. This mechanism should continue to incorporate the voices of parliamentarians, representatives of religions and beliefs, and civil society.
- Encourage the IPU to also integrate the outcomes of this Conference into its regular programme of work and to submit this document to the 147th IPU Assembly in October 2023.

We welcome the invitation by the Parliament of Italy for the Inter-Parliamentary Union to organize a global interfaith meeting in Rome in 2025.

We thank the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco for hosting this unique gathering and express our gratitude to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, King of Morocco, who granted his patronage to this Conference. In conclusion, we encourage all participants to carry deep into their respective communities the spirit of solidarity and dialogue that we experienced during these three days here in Marrakesh.



Delegates mingle during the coffee breaks at the Palais des Congrès