



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

Inaugural ceremony for the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue

Marrakech (Morocco), 13 June 2023

Mr. President,
Honourable Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Honourable Speaker of the House of Councillors,
Members of Parliament,
Distinguished representatives of religions, beliefs, faith-based civil society organizations and academia,
Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

I can only echo the words of my colleague and friend, Mr. Duarte Pacheco, in thanking the Parliament of the Kingdom of Morocco for hosting us and for their generosity and commitment to this joint endeavour. Let me also extend my thanks for the fruitful cooperation we have had with our other partners.

Ladies and gentlemen, of course, as the President of the IPU has just said, Marrakech is a special place for the IPU by reason of having hosted the 107th IPU Assembly. The city of Marrakesh is also not only famous for its history of coexistence between different religions and beliefs, it is also the city which, in 2012, commemorated a very important document promoting coexistence. The Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in the Muslim World recalls a document from the seventh century called the Charter of Medina. It was the first written constitution in Islam which regulated relations between the Muslim Prophet Mohammad, his followers, and the residents of Medina, which also included Jews. This constitution detailed the rights and duties of the citizens of Medina, regardless of their religion. It marks, as we have just heard from His Majesty the King of Morocco, an important example of citizenship and conflict resolution in interfaith relations.

At the IPU, we also have a long history of promoting citizenship and conflict resolution – maybe not 1400 years, but it is part of our DNA.

Since its establishment in 1889, the IPU has been relying on the tools of parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy to work towards more peaceful and democratic societies with strong institutions and values. The work of the IPU is governed by five core values: equality, inclusiveness, respect, integrity and solidarity. In particular, the IPU is committed to convening parliamentarians who mirror society in all its diversity.

Inclusion especially lies at the core of our work.

Our current strategy encourages parliaments to incorporate a wider view of the stakeholders, interactions and dynamics that influence parliaments and parliamentarians, to understand themselves as part of broader ecosystems of different stakeholders, for democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, we live in a world where the influence of religion and belief on the identity and values of people, and in many cases on politics, cannot be underestimated. More than four out of five people worldwide identify with a religion. Many of you live in States where God is mentioned in the Constitution, others where legislation must align with religious law. Others live in systems which are based on the separation of religion from the State.

On the basis of this, we have integrated engagement with religion and belief into our work. It is my pleasure to share with you today Part 1 of the Parliamentary Report on Religion and Belief. In this report, we consider the institutional engagement of parliaments with religion or belief.

The report draws on research and good practices shared by our Member Parliaments and by experts in the field. It considers different ways in which parliaments, as institutions, engage with religion or belief, such as: reserved seats for religious minorities, parliamentary committees dealing with religion or belief, prayers that are held at the beginning of sessions, parliamentary dress codes, commemorations of religious events by parliament, to name a few.

As a point of illustration: the cover picture is from the parliament of New Zealand. Following the Christchurch mosque attacks in 2019, the Parliament suspended its rules on allowing “strangers” to enter the debate chamber, inviting representatives of the Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu, Ratana, Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian faiths and churches to address parliament.

We invite you to consider this publication, and more than that – to share your own experiences with us. This report is intended to be a living document that will continue to grow as more parliaments share their good practices. After this Conference we will produce Part 2 of the report, which will look at the experiences of parliamentarians engaging with these issues. If any of you here – parliamentarians or others – would be interested in sharing your experiences with us, please do not hesitate to approach my colleagues.

Now, coming to our present Conference, we are here to continue this interaction between some of the most influential actors in our societies – parliamentarians on the one hand and representatives of religion and belief on the other.

We believe strongly that interfaith dialogue can and must be an important enabler of peace.

In the coming days, we want to consider and build on what we have in common – such as our shared belief in human dignity and the need to pull together towards securing a better future for the generations that will come after us. We would like to find ways to engage together and build more peaceful, inclusive and just societies, where the rule of law prevails, the fundamental freedoms of all human beings are respected, and no one is left behind.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a unique opportunity here to share our thoughts and experiences, to identify common challenges, and to learn from the wealth of good practices out there.

So it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Marrakesh, and to encourage a spirit of exchange, guided by respect and our common desire to work for a better world.

I wish you all a successful Conference.