



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

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Kingdom of Morocco

The Parliament

Speech by Ms. Heela Yoon Afghan Peacebuilder

Inaugural ceremony for the Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue

Marrakech (Morocco), 13 June 2023

Salam Aliukam Everyone,

Before I start my speech, I want to thank inter-parliamentary Union for providing youth people the opportunity to attend these platforms and amplify the voices of grassroots peacebuilders. My name is Heela Yoon, and I am peacebuilder from Afghanistan. As I stand here, I considered myself one of the privilege ones who can speak here and can engage with international community while millions of my Afghan girls and women cannot, and that is why I want to amplify the voices of millions of Afghan women and girls from my country who are still inside Afghanistan with no future.

As we stand here today with hundreds of different faith, religious leaders, and peacebuilders, I want to remind everyone that today is day 631 since the Taliban regime shut down closed schools and universities towards Afghan girls. The only country where basic education and basic human rights have been taken away from girls and women. While Islam is a religion that promotes and encourage education, the current government does not have any religious justification into why they have shut down universities and schools towards women.

The very first word of the Quran which reveals on prophet Muhammad by Allah is 'IQRA', it means to read. The first university in the world was established by a Muslim Woman Fatima Al-Fihiri (University of al-Qarawiyyin) it shows how Islam always promotes women education and do not deny them.

In the country where I came from, religion has always been used by many people to prove their wrongdoings throughout decades. My parents lived in Afghanistan and witnessed many powers come and go. We still don't have my grandfather body and no grave because we do never find the body. My mother was shot 2 times and left in a based to die. Millions of people died in Afghanistan and millions and millions of them became refugees and left the country due constant war.

When I started my organization called Afghan Youth Ambassadors for Peace, a grassroots civil society organization working on localizing peace and education in Eastern provinces, I was hopeful that through localization we can achieve sustainable peace. We trained more than 100 young women and men in Afghanistan on preventing violent extremism, interfaith peacebuilding dialogues and gender equality. We conducted local peacebuilding with religious, tribal, and local leaders on women access to education from Islamic preceptive and peacebuilding. We supported more than 5000 families in Afghanistan through our Afghan for Afghan project making women the first responders to humanitarian crisis.

What I learnt is through involving every stakeholder of the community and having a bottom to top approach to dialogues will solve many problems. We need more spaces for everyone to listen and make sure everyone is included. We need more tolerance and listening which is what my religion promotes.

Today, with all the restrictions on women education, freedom of movement, Afghan women are still showing resilience and fighting for their rights. We believe through localization and meaningful engagement with every stakeholder and without exclusion we can achieve a sustainable peace.

Today at this conference I want to address the religious leaders and the parliamentarians here to provide more spaces for dialogues and engagements. Work with young people and don't just invite us to fill the quota. We do want to be heard and we do want to be involved in all the process not just consultations. Focus and provide opportunities of grassroots initiatives and those specially led my young women. Let's make something out of this conference and not just back-to-back speeches and receptions. Every small commitment counts and it starts with connecting to local leaders on the ground.