

HM the King Addresses Message to Participants in Parliamentary Conference on 'Interfaith Dialogue: Working Together for Our Common Future' (Full Text)

His Majesty King Mohammed VI addressed, on Tuesday, a message to participants in the Parliamentary Conference on "Interfaith dialogue: working together for our common future", which is held from June 13 to 15 in Marrakech.

Here follows the full text of the Royal Message, read out by speaker of the House of Representatives, Rachid Talbi El Alami:

"Praise be to God,

May peace and blessings be upon the Prophet, His Kith and Kin

Your Excellency, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union,

Your Excellencies, Heads of Legislative Institutions,

Distinguished representatives of religious institutions and bodies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I should like to say how pleased I am with your choice of the Kingdom of Morocco as the venue for this important international conference. This event is special, not only on account of the topic it will address, but also because of the caliber of the participants. Indeed, your conference has brought together, for the first time, parliamentarians, in their capacity as legislators and representatives of their fellow citizens, as well as a large number of religious leaders, distinguished scholars, experts and researchers from all corners of the world. They will study and exchange views on an important, topical issue whose implications are clear to all in the current international and regional contexts.

I wish to welcome all participants in this forum and to commend the Moroccan Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union on holding this conference and aptly choosing the theme of interfaith dialogue for it. I hope your discussions and debates will lead to constructive conclusions and recommendations, as well as to new approaches that can highlight the need for interfaith dialogue and define the nature of the relations that should bring together the followers of different religions, making sure harmony, peace and mutual respect prevail.

Needless to say, the Inter-Parliamentary Union has acquired great expertise from the various meetings, conferences and forums it has been convening on topics and issues relating to the theme of today's conference. It is, thus, well-positioned to enrich your discussions and debates, and make qualitative contributions to your proceedings, building on the innovative approaches to be introduced by various presentations and papers on interfaith relations, which should be grounded in serious, meaningful and constructive dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Humanity is facing daunting challenges. It is grappling with a situation marked by security, economic, political, health and environmental crises on one hand, and sincere efforts to use mechanisms, tools and energies to address or contain these crises, on the other. Today's conference clearly attests to that resolve. It is part of a collective endeavour to develop a plan of action for parliamentarians and religious leaders for both national and international action. One must keep in mind the alarming conditions existing in our world today, amid calls for extremism, self-centredness, hatred and reclusiveness, not to mention terrorist acts that exploit the situation to foment subversive projects in the name of religion, whereas religion has nothing to do with this.

Here and there, public opinion is misled into believing that what is unfolding is a clash of religions or civilizations. In fact, and as I stressed more than twenty years ago, at the opening of the 107th Conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, what our world is witnessing today is not so much a clash of civilizations as a clash of 'ignorances'.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is, indeed, regrettable that we keep hearing about acts of violence, persecution, and killing motivated by religious and sectarian beliefs, or cultural affiliation. It is also distressing to note that hostility to religions has become a favored subject used by some, as part of their outbidding electoral tactics.

We also regret that some public debate platforms, including a number of audiovisual media, find it quite normal that the 'Other' be stigmatized because of religion, color or ethnicity, with all the risks this kind of attitude entails for people's consciousness and culture, and the incitement of public opinion. The memory of mankind still bears witness to acts of genocide and devastating wars triggered by discourses and ideologies rooted in religious bigotry, or sectarian and ethnic intolerance.

Contrary to international human rights covenants, to which the international community has adhered, ideologies and discourses based on "natural inequality" - which categorize people according to their religion, origin or the color of their skin - are thriving today. They are presented and showcased as normal, legitimate doctrines.

These are particularly negative signs when it comes to the future of interfaith, intercultural relations. They require that all forces and stakeholders believing in equality between religions, between civilizations and between the children of Adam come together to reverse this trend, and adopt policies that would stem this perilous decline in human consciousness.

It goes without saying that the institutions represented in this conference are at the heart of the lofty battle for the promotion of understanding, tolerance and coexistence through institutional action, awareness-raising and education. Fanaticism does not reside in religions, nor does it exist in religious books. Rather, it is spurred and guided by the interests lurking behind fanatic acts and beliefs. There is no clearer evidence as to the greatness of the unity of religions than these words by Almighty God:

"Say ye: 'We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: And we bow to Allah".(The Cow, verse 136).

Ladies and gentlemen,

The bleak picture reflected by the conflict of beliefs in the world today should not obscure the positive and bright aspects, nor the bold initiatives launched to strengthen communication and consolidate values rooted in tolerance, understanding and coexistence between the members of the international community, and between followers of different faiths. It is gratifying to note that there are men and women with a keen sense of conscience, as well as responsible political decision makers and sagacious, enlightened thinkers - in the West as in the East, in the South as in the North - who shoulder the responsibility of combatting hatred and promoting dialogue and understanding between different faiths, cultures and civilizations.

I am delighted that all of you, who are gathered here today, are part of these political elites, religious leaders, intellectuals and thinkers, who believe that mankind's mission on earth, as willed by the Almighty, is for people to get to know and cooperate with one another, and to coexist, regardless of religious or doctrinal differences. That is the responsibility and sacred mission of all humans.

I am convinced that if those elites were to come together, then interfaith dialogue, meaningful coexistence, understanding and cooperation for the accomplishment of humanitarian goals would be key levers to build on in order to spare humanity the evils of strife, affliction and suffering.

However, that cannot be achieved - and this, by the way, is one of the matters at stake in this conference - unless we put words into action, show a keenness to revisit the concept of interfaith dialogue and achieve a quantum leap in collective awareness of the importance of dialogue and coexistence, and of the perils represented by persistent reclusiveness, fanaticism and introversion.

I do hope the Marrakesh Conference will come up with a rational and convincing response to the drifts towards intolerance, hatred, contempt for religions, and the treatment of people based on their faith, ethnicity or the color of their skin.

I am sure your diverse political, intellectual and religious backgrounds constitute a key element for the fulfilment of this ambition. Whereas the parliamentarians participating in this conference are empowered to pass legislation that facilitates dialogue and staves off discourses of introversion and fanaticism, religious leaders and institutions, for their part, have a mission of guidance and awareness-raising; they can summon their spiritual authority to groom and guide, and to warn against perilous inclinations that ruin coexistence and fruitful interfaith dialogue.

We should realize that fearing a given religion – or, to put it more correctly, prompting feelings of fear of that religion – leads to hatred for the manifestations of that faith and for the civilization associated with it. This, then, leads to incitement against that religion, to discrimination and to acts of violence. Unfortunately, many influential media organizations simply encourage, in their editorial line, a spiral of fanaticism and counter fanaticism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that your conference will lead to action plans and that the three components represented here will play decisive roles in their implementation, at the level of each country as well as on a global scale. In this regard, I wish to emphasize the need to set a joint mechanism, to be coordinated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, whose mission would be to make interfaith dialogue a common, lofty goal for the entire international community. That goal should be defended in international forums and considered one of the key principles of democratic governance in parliamentary practice, as well as an indicator of respect for pluralism and cultural diversity.

Since the very basis of coexistence is for religion to serve as a bulwark against extremism - and not a vehicle for it - the enforcement of this principle, together with due respect for other faiths, require pedagogical and educational efforts by schools, universities, the media, religious institutions and responsible public debate platforms. With that in mind, I hope your conference's declaration will include practical suggestions to achieve this objective.

I am sure you realize, from your respective positions - ladies and gentlemen - the devastating consequences of disrespect and contempt for religions, the scale of the internal and transnational disasters they may cause, and their human and material cost to international stability, which is a prerequisite for institutional and democratic development, and for progress and prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Kingdom of Morocco is keen to remain a model state, in which the followers of the monotheistic religions coexist in an environment of fraternity and security. This policy is consistent with my country's centuries-long history of religious and cultural diversity and pluralism. Indeed, for centuries, Muslims, Jews and Christians coexisted on this land, and continue to do so. It was this land of Morocco that welcomed and protected thousands of people - Muslims and Jews - who fled religious persecution in the Iberian Peninsula during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Contemporary history records that my grandfather, His late Majesty King Mohammed V - may he rest in peace - provided care and protection to thousands of followers of the Jewish faith, who were fleeing persecution from the Nazi-allied Vichy government.

And when he ascended the throne of his worthy ancestors, my venerable father, His late Majesty King Hassan II - may God rest his soul - remained faithful to that same policy throughout his reign, providing care to the Moroccan citizens of Jewish faith. His keen desire to consolidate the values of coexistence and brotherhood among all Moroccans - Muslims and Jews alike - remained undimmed.

History also records that His late Majesty King Hassan II - blessed be his soul - received His Holiness Pope John Paul II in 1985, in what was the first visit ever by a pope to an Islamic country. Thirty-four years after that historic visit, I received, in March 2019, His Holiness Pope Francis, Sovereign of the Vatican. I invited His Holiness to come on an official visit to Morocco because I believe in the virtues of interfaith dialogue, and in the importance of directing the efforts of religious authorities to serving peace, cooperation and fraternity among all humans.

Since I ascended the throne, I have sought to enhance the spirit of brotherhood, coexistence, cooperation and cohesion between all Moroccans - Jews and Muslims alike - given that this is one of the main pillars of Moroccan civilization. The urban fabric of Moroccan cities is replete with signs that are of great significance, with mosques, synagogues and churches standing not far from one another. These are not just necessities of urban development; rather, they attest to the spiritual, human and cultural values inherent in Moroccan society, and to the importance of the tolerance underpinning it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Although Islam is the religion of the state, the Kingdom's Constitution stipulates that the state guarantees the free exercise of religious practices for all citizens. As I have always affirmed, in my capacity as King of Morocco and Commander of the Faithful, I am entrusted with ensuring the free practice of religious rites as well as the protection of Moroccan Jews and Christians from other countries, who live in Morocco.

Given Morocco's record with respect to promoting religious coexistence and moderation, it is quite natural for the Kingdom to be among the first countries to establish international mechanisms for cultural dialogue, and to take measures to combat terrorism, extremism and fanaticism. This is evidenced by the convening, in November 2022, of the ninth session of the Alliance of Civilizations Global Forum, which was held in Fez – a city as steeped in history as it is committed to interfaith coexistence.

Moreover, I was particularly keen to make sure the Kingdom of Morocco made a significant contribution to the establishment and structuring of that Forum and see to it that it meets on a regular basis. Indeed, I believe that the Forum provides a platform of action for the future, and that it is a means to promote cultural concord and peace, and a lever that facilitates coexistence.

With the same resolve, Morocco contributed to the establishment of other mechanisms and continues to act to bolster their role and host their meetings, as is the case with the International Conference on Dialogue between Cultures and Religions, and the conference on the rights of religious minorities in Islamic lands.

In a similar vein, I am sure you are aware of Morocco's decisive and effective contribution to the establishment and structuring of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, co-chaired by the Kingdom of Morocco for three terms between 2015 and 2022. These are principled, proactive policies warranted by our responsibilities and obligations towards all components of the international community.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My firm belief in the importance of coexistence and dialogue is second only to my commitment to moderation and tolerance, and to the rejection of all forms of prejudice, hatred and extremism. I am convinced, as well, of the need to implement policies that facilitate the achievement of these goals. In this regard, I am proud of what has been accomplished in Morocco concerning the management of the religious domain and the performance of the institutions created for this purpose, including the ones provided for in the Constitution, and in particular the Higher Ulema Council - the only institution qualified to issue fatwas. The aim is to prevent any deviation from the purpose of fatwas.

I think we can pride ourselves on the accomplishments of the religious supervisory institutions I have created to foster the values of moderation, tolerance and coexistence. I am referring, in particular, to the Mohammedia League of Ulema - one of the main partners in the organization of this conference - the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Murshidin and Murshidats, and the Mohammed VI Foundation of African Ulema, which brings together and coordinates the efforts of African Muslim scholars in order to shed light on and promote these values. This is in keeping with my commitment to the duty of solidarity and spiritual cooperation with our brothers and sisters in other African countries.

We should keep in mind that if we manage to foster constructive interfaith, intercultural dialogue, we will be providing answers to many of the dilemmas and challenges threatening the future of coexistence and of our planet. All of us are in the same boat, facing a common destiny. As we rise to challenges, we must ponder on the world we will be bequeathing to the coming generations. This is as

much the responsibility of parliaments, religious institutions and intellectual elites, as it is the duty of governments, civil society, and the media.

Before concluding, I would like, once again, to welcome you to Morocco as our honored guests in your home away from home - the land of tolerance, coexistence, diversity and fraternity; the venue of fruitful meetings on some of the most important issues. The aim is to serve humanity and the future mankind.

I wish your conference every success.

Thank you,

Wassalamu alaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh.“