



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Speech by Dr. Tulia Ackson, IPU President

Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future – Opening of the General Debate

Rome, 19 June 2025

Excellencies,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Esteemed religious leaders,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

It is a great honour to address you today standing on one of the lands of holiness as the President of global parliament of parliaments.

I would like to thank our gracious hosts, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of Italy, for welcoming us to Rome. It is quite a remarkable moment for us to be here in the course of this Jubilee year, and to have the privilege to sit in your magnificent debating chamber for two days and meet with leaders of religions, beliefs, civil society and international experts from around the world.

This Conference provides us with an opportunity to discuss how we, as legislators, alongside all other actors of goodwill, can work together for our common future being also a valuable tool for peacebuilding and diplomacy. Then for us all, people of all religions, beliefs and faiths, are excited to attend an audience with the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, as a way to reaffirm our united commitment to the common good.

Dear Colleagues, I highly recognize this Conference, as a unique event to bring us all together at a time when the world is facing multiple challenges ranging from peace and security, cultural distortions, race discrimination, gender violence, belief abuses and all sorts of instabilities and conflicts.

Why are we, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, instigating this conversation between national parliaments and representatives of the global religion and belief community? In addition, why now?

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is not only the global organization of national parliaments, it is the oldest political multilateral organization in the world, and has been around for 136 years.

The IPU has seen the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the first and second world wars, the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, the breakdown of colonialism, the emergence of modern nation States, the Cold War, and every other global conflict, natural disaster and moment of triumph and loss since 1889.

Our commitment throughout all of this has been to be a convener, to provide a platform for dialogue for the sake of peace and for the promotion of democracy, for everyone.

However, dialogue cannot take place in echo chambers. In addition, democracy thrives on inclusivity and vibrant exchange.

The IPU's current Strategy encourages parliaments to engage with their broader ecosystems, with all of society.

That is precisely what this Conference aims to do.

We recognize that we are facing very difficult times. Our societies are being torn apart by different crises – conflicts are being fought both online and offline, with words and with weapons.

Not only that our common future is at stake: it is our present. We must call upon coming together not just to safeguard a future for our children, but also to protect the rights and livelihoods of our parents and peers.

Parliamentarians have an essential role to play in the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

It is our job to uphold the rule of law, human rights and justice through our functions of representation, oversight, budgetary approval and legislation. Recently, we have begun to speak more of a fifth function of MPs – parliamentary diplomacy.

This is a tool to leverage the potential of our networks and expertise, beyond national borders, to promote dialogue, understanding and cooperation, and even to mediate conflicts.

Representatives of religions and beliefs are important dialogue partners for parliamentarians. Religion and belief provide answers to many questions: they inform our values and give our lives meaning. Religious leaders are people of influence and religious organizations care for the needy and elderly and educate our children.

Political and religious actors may have different mandates, but we are all concerned citizens and united by shared values such as peace, respect, equality, humanity, fraternity, sorority, accountability and compassion, as well as a commitment to working for the good of our constituents, congregants and broader society.

Many of us here today are leaders in our communities. As our societies become more fragmented, it falls to us to be responsible guides, and advocates of justice and peace.

Gathered here in Rome, we will seize this unique opportunity to see how dialogue can inform national policies and legislation, how we can identify avenues to uphold the equal rights and dignity of all, and how we can combat all forms of hatred and discrimination and foster social cohesion.

Dear friends, I want to express my appreciation for how far many of you have come to be here today, and to recognize your belief in the importance of talking across national, party and religious lines, and of sharing your expertise for the common good.

I would like to ask all of you here today to make three commitments for your time at this Conference:

- Be willing to listen, because in every exchange there is a space for learning
- Be willing to share, so that others may benefit from the expertise in which you have invested so much
- Be ready to reach out. The pool of expertise here is exceptional. Our experts will spark your curiosity, but one short speech from the podium cannot satisfy it. I urge you to connect with each other and draw on the wealth of talent that gathered here today.

I want to wish you all fruitful deliberations.

My greatest wish for this Conference is that we can work together in a space of mutual respect and in the spirit of our common humanity.

I thank you for listening.