

**Opening remarks of Ambassador Simona-Mirela Miculescu (Romania),
President of the 42nd UNESCO General Conference, on the occasion of
the Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue**

Esteemed Parliamentarians,
Honored Religious Leaders,
Distinguished Guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Is there any way of delivering mankind from the menace of war? With the advance of modern science, this question has become not merely philosophical, but existential — a matter of life or death for civilization."

These powerful words come from the renowned 1931 letter *Why War?*, written by Albert Einstein to Sigmund Freud. In his reply, Freud reflected: "whatever makes for cultural development — and, we may add today, quality education — is working also against war."

This exchange reminds us of a simple fact: peace cannot be dictated from above. It must be nurtured from within — in how we think, how we relate to one another, and how we shape the world we share.

Last year, we commemorated the centenary of the precursor of UNESCO — the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, created after World War I, to foster the dialogue across borders and to cultivate what was then called "a universal conscience."

UNESCO was born two decades later, from the devastation of the second World War, founded on the idea that: "*Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.*"

Today, nearly a century on, we must ask: Where do we stand?

Violent conflicts are spiraling. Hyperconnectivity has not guaranteed harmony. Digital abundance has not deepened understanding. Information moves at the speed of light—but so does disinformation. Algorithms reinforce bias. Deepfakes imitate truth.

The hard truth is that peace — and indeed our collective existence — is under pressure.

This erosion of trust is a civic crisis. It threatens our democracies, our capacity for cooperation, and our ability to imagine a future together.

This is why the theme of this conference—"Strengthening Trust and Embracing Hope for Our Common Future"—is not only timely. It is vital.

I am deeply honored to participate in this discussion and to bring UNESCO's perspective into the debate.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Securing our common future requires weaving together trust and hope — from the halls of parliaments to places of worship, from multilateral institutions to civil society. In every faith and every legal tradition lies a shared call: to build a community through compassion, trust, and responsibility.

Let me highlight a few key areas of UNESCO's recent work that are particularly relevant to our discussion.

First, Education.

UNESCO's *Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development*, adopted unanimously by 194 Member States in November 2023, is the only global standard for transforming education to build peace. It emphasizes that, beyond literacy and numeracy, learners

must cultivate empathy, critical thinking, intercultural understanding, and environmental stewardship. It underlines that there is no peace without gender equality and girls' education. We will explore this further in our panel discussion. But let me underline one thing: parliamentarians have a key role in translating this Recommendation into national legislation and education systems, so that every teacher, every learner, and the entire society can benefit.

Second: Ethical Digital Transformation

Digital Transformation, including Artificial Intelligence, is reshaping our lives. It offers the promise of tremendous benefits. But without ethical guardrails, it can reproduce discrimination, magnify divisions, and threaten rights and freedoms.

UNESCO adopted the first-ever global *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* in 2021. This comprehensive framework guides national efforts across multiple domains — from data governance and education to health, the environment, and gender equality. Here too, your role as legislators is essential.

National AI policies must embed human rights, transparency, and fairness — ensuring that AI serves humanity and promotes sustainable development.

Third. A Commons of Trust in the Digital Age

At the 2023 “Internet for Trust” Conference, we addressed one of the defining challenges of our time: how to govern digital platforms in a way that protects freedom of expression while tackling the harms of disinformation, hate speech, and conspiracy theories.

The result was the adoption of a comprehensive set of Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms, providing a roadmap for States and companies alike—calling for transparency in content moderation, independent oversight, algorithmic accountability, and the meaningful inclusion of users and civil society in decision-making processes.

Because if trust is to survive in the digital age, the rules that govern our online spaces must be fair, transparent, and anchored in democratic principles.

We are also proud of our collaboration with the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Center for Law and Democracy in launching a Massive Open Online Course on Freedom of Expression for Parliaments in October 2024. Over 4,000 participants — from more than 180 countries — have already taken part. In a world where truth itself is increasingly fragile, initiatives like this strengthen the foundations of democracy.

Finally — and most importantly — let us remember that we are one humanity, living on one planet.

Our cultures give us identity. Our faiths give us meaning. But our shared humanity gives us purpose.

There is no contradiction between honoring our cultural and religious diversity and, at the same time, recognizing our common destiny. On the contrary: the deeper our roots, the stronger our respect for the roots of others.

This is the spirit of unity in diversity that makes peace possible — and sustainable.

Excellencies,

Let us work together — across politics and religions, across cultures and nations, across international organizations and national institutions — to construct the defenses of peace in the minds of every human being.

In doing so, we carry forward the legacy of those who, a century ago, dared to speak of a *universal conscience* — the deep awareness that our futures are interdependent, and that peace is not an aspiration for the few, but a responsibility shared by all.

Thank you.