



SPEECH

EVENT: Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. Parliamentarians in dialogue with religion and belief: Strengthening trust and embracing hope in our common future.

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Mr. **CLAUDIO CAJADO** (PP-BA) delivers the following speech:

Your Excellencies, distinguished parliamentarians, honorable religious representatives, ladies and gentlemen academics and members of civil society,

It is an honor to participate in this Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, a healthy space for debates where we can, in a peaceful and fruitful union between politics and religion, reaffirm our commitment to build a common future based on mutual trust, respect and hope.

I would like to briefly bring here the Brazilian experience in dealing with the relationship between State and religion which seems to me to be outstanding.

As is well known, we are a plural nation. In our territory, millennial traditions, diverse beliefs and a rich tapestry of expressions of faith coexist.

This diversity is not only tolerated, but protected by a solid legal apparatus that guarantees freedom of belief, the free exercise of cults and the protection of religious places and practices.

Our Constitution is clear in ensuring the laicism of the State, but also in protecting, with vigor, the right of each citizen to profess his faith. It effectively determines state action to ensure that all Brazilians have access to religious assistance, considered a fundamental right.

Thus, despite prohibiting any relationship of dependence between the State and religions, Brazil harbors, in the name of the public interest, the collaboration between both.

Our Constitution also prohibits the collection of taxes on temples of any cult, recognizes optional religious education in public schools and guarantees the right to spiritual assistance in hospitals, prisons and shelters.

In addition, infra-constitutional laws punish acts of religious intolerance, regulate conscientious objection for believers on holy days and, more recently, typify crimes of religious racism and injury motivated by belief.

These legislative advances reinforce the clear message, given by our Parliament, that Brazil does not tolerate hatred disguised as opinion, nor prejudice disguised as criticism.

Within the scope of the Chamber of Deputies, a body that I have the honor of representing here, the theme of peaceful coexistence between religions and the fight against intolerance has mobilized a series of initiatives. Proposals are being processed to expand criminal protection against crimes committed in temples, expand access to religious assistance in public and private spaces, and ensure respect for different convictions in the school environment and in work relationships.

In addition, we periodically hold solemn sessions in honor of the various faith traditions, promote public hearings

on human rights and religious diversity, and maintain active parliamentary fronts dedicated to dialogue with religious segments.

The Brazilian people, ladies and gentlemen, are deeply religious, and we understand that this religiosity not only can, but should resonate in the instances of their representation. Religion is perhaps the factor that most influences the worldview, values and project of society that people espouse. And this is an unavoidable fact.

It does not seem appropriate, therefore, to close one's eyes to this reality and pretend that it does not exist, trying to completely clean up the channels of political representation of the population from the religiosity that manifests itself in it in such an intense, natural and legitimate way.

Therefore, giving rise to religious expression in parliaments is entirely possible and appropriate, provided that, it should be repeated, we do not want to repress or sideline minority religions (and *non-religions*).

Religion and democracy do not exclude each other, but complement each other, precisely because both are based on the idea of respect for the other.

Both religion and politics that depart from this premise are distorted. When this occurs, the approach cannot be the search for the suppression of one of them or the separation between both, but a reorientation, through dialogue, towards harmonious coexistence.

As we look to the future, it is imperative that Parliament continues to be a space for active listening and constant dialogue with society and its various religious communities. This respectful treatment given to difference by parliamentarians also serves as an example for the population, which observes us attentively.

Let us move forward in building bridges and not walls, in the defense of peace and not conflict.

To recognize that the other has a right to his faith, so that I have a right to mine, is to strengthen trust. And to make

dialogue an ever-evolving institutional practice is to embrace hope. It is in this spirit that we reaffirm, today, our commitment to a more just, plural and fraternal future.

Thank you very much.

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