

Opening remarks by His Eminence the Archbishop Ioannis of Zambia and
Mozambique

Your Excellency IPU President,
Honourable Members of Parliaments,
Esteemed experts of International Organizations,
My brothers and sisters from all faiths,
Distinguished Professors and members of the
academia,
Dear participants,

It is with great joy and emotion that I have the honor of participating in the opening ceremony of the General Debate of the Rome Conference on Interfaith Dialogue. This is a unique occasion, where, on the initiative of the IPU, the crossroads of the meeting of the political and religious spheres is created for the benefit of Humanity.

We must not forget that there is no political space without citizens and there is no religious space without believers. You politicians and we clergy

are not simply authorities and administrations of institutions and powers. We are representatives, mandate holders and trustees of the people who make up our societies. We therefore bear full responsibility for peaceful coexistence, education of youth, sustainable development and social development of the peoples and communities we represent. We must primarily struggle for a more peaceful, more just and more inclusive world for the present and future generations.

In my brief opening speech, I would like to share my personal experiences of the way I have experienced the collaboration between political institutions and the Orthodox Church, which I serve. Please allow me to point out from the outset that this collaboration has been fruitful in all cases and has left me with the best impressions.

During my pastorate under the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa, I found in most cases that the collaboration of our Church with political institutions was necessary and imperative, in order to support our parishes and communities of believers, as well as to alleviate the pain of our suffering brothers and sisters. Especially, for our Orthodox Church which represents a religious minority in African countries.

A typical example was the collaboration of our Orthodox Archdiocese with the Government Authorities of the Republic of Zambia and Mozambique to provide full scholarships to 20 students from the two countries to study in Ecclesiastical Schools in Greece. Another example concerned our collaboration with political institutions in Zambia to improve the conditions of detention in correctional institutions for women and minors.

Furthermore, the religious space must be open to collaborations and joint initiatives with international political organizations, such as the United Nations and the IPU. I will never forget the good collaboration we had with the United Nations Office in Zambia and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in the context of the delivery of health assistance to refugee communities affected by the cholera epidemic that broke out in Northern Zambia in 2018. And in this case, the result of this joint initiative was the saving of human lives.

As you already know, the most representative wing of the political space is the parliamentary institutions. I had the pleasure and honor to see very early on the great importance of collaboration with parliaments. I have always a strong belief that national parliaments are by nature closer to the people, and therefore to the communities of our believers, and therefore

constitute an excellent space for initiatives and actions centered on the common good.

It is a rare phenomenon for representatives of religions to get involved in parliamentary procedures and parliamentary work. However, for several years I had the privilege to develop strong ties with women and men parliamentarians and parliamentary institutions in Europe and Africa. Thus, for the last 20 years I have facilitated as Liaison between the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) and the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), two international parliamentary institutions with important work and actions. My collaboration with the IAO and the PAP has given me the opportunity to understand how the parliamentary and political space work.

In the video that was shown a few moment ago, you saw a photo of me and the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Zambia, Her Excellency Mrs. Nelly Mutti, jointly planting the Olympic Olive Tree in the grounds of the National Assembly. This symbolic gesture, which took place last year as part of the activities co-organized by the Orthodox Archdiocese of Zambia and Mozambique with the National Assembly of Zambia to celebrate the Olympic Games, was intended to convey the message of the Olympic Truce and Olympic Education to the youth of Zambia. The Parliament of Zambia has embraced our proposal for the activities of the Olympic Education program and we are preparing together to establish an Olympic Village in the capital of the country, Lusaka, where young and old people can be educated in the Olympic Ideal as a way of shaping behavior.

As I am not accustomed to staying up late writing speeches that make others sleepy, I would like to conclude my speech today with these indicative good practices that I have presented to you from my personal experiences. Allow me only to appeal to the IPU leadership to continue to strengthen their efforts on the crucial issue of the interaction of religion and politics.

Thank you for your attention.

