



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.

T +41 22 919 41 50  
F +41 22 919 41 60  
E [postbox@ipu.org](mailto:postbox@ipu.org)  
[www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)

Chemin du Pommier 5  
Case postale 330  
1218 Le Grand-Saconnex  
Geneva – Switzerland

## Speech by Mr. Martin Chungong, IPU Secretary General

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Annual High-Level Meeting

New York, 21 September 2023

Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today at the UNAOC Group of Friends meeting, and may I begin by offering my congratulations to UNAOC for its many impressive initiatives. The IPU very much values its partnership with UNAOC to advance interfaith and intercultural dialogue, and we are delighted that it has opened an office in Geneva.

The IPU has been exploring parliamentary engagement with religion and belief to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for a number of years. This year, the IPU published the first part of a Parliamentary Report on Religion and Belief, based on input from our member Parliaments. The Report considers different ways in which parliaments, as institutions, engage with religion or belief. It includes data on reserved seats for religious minorities, parliamentary committees dealing with religious or belief issues, prayers that are held at the beginning of sessions, parliamentary dress codes, debates on religious freedom, cross-party caucuses on interfaith issues, to name a few examples. We are currently working on part two of the Report, which will look at how parliamentarians engage with religion and belief in their daily work.

Building on the findings from the Report, in June of this year, the IPU organised an International Conference on interfaith dialogue, in cooperation with the Parliament of Morocco and Religions for Peace, and with support from UNAOC. It brought together members of parliament with representatives of United Nations bodies, international organisations, religions, beliefs, faith-based and civil society organisations, and academia, to jointly explore action points for building more peaceful and inclusive societies.

The Conference was attended by more than 700 delegates and was structured around several panels and a General Debate. The panels addressed some of the areas where interfaith dialogue, including with parliamentarians, could promote peaceful coexistence and inclusive societies. Panels looked at promoting the rule of law and citizenship, using intra-faith dialogue to counter sectarian conflict, upholding human rights, countering hate speech – a panel moderated by Ms. Nihal Saad from the UNAOC, and recognizing parliamentarians and religious actors as bridge-builders.

As it happens, on the eve of the panel about hate speech, the UN Security Council passed its resolution 2686 on promoting tolerance, preventing incitement and condemning hate speech. This reinforced that this issue is of topical concern for parliaments and governments alike.

Especially on this issue of hate speech, the work of national parliaments is very important. Parliamentarians, as legislators, need to carefully navigate the narrow path of upholding freedom of expression but not to the point where it incites to discrimination, hostility or violence.

The Conference concluded with the Marrakech Communiqué, which affirms that interfaith dialogue that is grounded in support of fundamental rights and freedoms is an essential tool for promoting inclusivity and peaceful coexistence, upholding the rule of law and encouraging collective efforts to achieve a better society. It encourages an all-of-society effort to address the burning issues of our time: from parliamentarians with their legislative power, as well as from official institutions such as the UN and civil

society. This outcome document has been circulated in the UN General Assembly under the agenda item Culture of Peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I sit here at the United Nations, I would like to conclude by reminding you that parliamentarians are the link between citizens and their governance structures. Dialogue between parliamentarians and other segments of society is therefore important for promoting social cohesion and building and maintaining trust in democratic institutions as a precondition for peaceful and sustainable States.

The IPU looks forward to exploring further avenues for how the parliamentary voice can contribute to promoting peace, inclusion and the rule of law through interfaith and intercultural dialogue, with UNAOC as an important partner.

Thank you.