



Inter-Parliamentary Union  
For democracy. For everyone.



## **Second Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future**

*Organized by the Italian Parliament and the Inter-Parliamentary Union  
with the support of Religions for Peace*

**Rome, 19-21 June 2025**

### **Description of sessions**

#### ***General Debate: Parliamentarians in dialogue with religion and belief: Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future***

The General Debate invites parliamentarians and representatives of religions, beliefs, faith-based organizations, the United Nations, international and civil society organizations and academia to share good practices on how parliamentary engagement with religion and belief can promote more peaceful, just and inclusive societies by bolstering trust between parliaments and broader society, strengthening social bonds, and fostering hope during turbulent times. Ongoing challenges at the national, regional or international level will be identified and participants will be encouraged to make recommendations on how to improve cooperation between parliaments and religions and beliefs to address shared concerns.

#### ***High-level panel: Countering hatred based on religion or belief: deescalating polarization, preventing dehumanization and religious weaponization***

Many societies are experiencing increased hatred based on religion or belief, with social and legal dimensions relevant for parliamentarians. Socially, this hatred fractures communities and contributes to a climate of distrust, fear and exclusion. It can target religious communities, often leaving minorities disproportionately affected. It can also be propagated by individuals or groups within religious communities against others. In the most extreme cases, such hatred incites discrimination, hostility or violence. Social media and cyberspace are particularly influential in enabling the spread of hatred, often amplifying disinformation and misinformation. Legally, the prevalence of such hatred may give rise to the question of the appropriate threshold for the criminalization of hate speech, in line with international standards, an issue on which there is much debate in the international community. Here, human rights and religious laws can be in tension. This high-level panel will consider avenues for jointly addressing the rise of hatred based on religion or belief while respecting basic human rights standards.

#### ***Thematic working session 1: Promoting peaceful coexistence***

Religion and belief belong to the fabric of societies and play an important role in shaping people's identity and values as well as how communities live together. Positive shared values around love for one's neighbour, social justice, care for the poor and compassion promote cohesive communal bonds and amplify religion and belief as a social good. Religion or belief can also drive conflict and be used to justify the exclusion of others or even violence. Parliaments and parliamentarians have various roles to play in the promotion of social cohesion among religiously diverse societies. They can amplify the positive values of religions and beliefs, use them to advance policy issues, and ensure that individuals' rights to exercise their religion or belief are guaranteed under the law. Parliamentarians can speak up for marginalized groups and speak out against hatred. In so doing they help create a more empathetic and understanding community in which people can reach agreements and solve problems more efficiently. This panel will bring together experts working on promoting peaceful coexistence to share their good practices and lessons learned.

***Thematic working session 2: Lessons from the Marrakesh Declaration (2016): Upholding the rights of religious minorities***

The *Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in the Muslim World* was signed in 2016 by over 250 Muslim scholars, religious leaders and political leaders, and provided guidance around citizenship in Muslim States, based on an early Islamic constitutional document, the Charter of Medina. The Declaration is testament to Islam's longstanding commitment to fostering peaceful coexistence with other religions and protecting religious minorities from persecution, displacement and discrimination in Muslim-majority countries. It also calls for the leaders of other religions to confront these same acts of injustice against Muslim minorities in their countries. This session will provide a platform for religious leaders, MPs and other stakeholders to explore the potential contribution of the Marrakesh Declaration to safeguarding the rights and freedoms of religious and belief minorities in Muslim-majority societies. The discussion will highlight key recommendations on implementation of the Declaration, and the particular contribution of parliaments and MPs in this regard. This session is supported by the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

***Panel 1: Advancing inclusive societies, ensuring freedom of religion or belief***

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief (FoRB) is guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as other international human rights instruments. As both a human right and an indicator of inclusion, FoRB plays an important role in contributing to building just and peaceful societies. Pope Francis called FoRB the "litmus test of all other human rights". It is, however, an unfortunate reality that no society is free from FoRB violations. This panel will allow participants to share expertise and good practices on how upholding FoRB contributes positively to advancing inclusive societies. It will also feature presentations of parliamentary networks and mechanisms dedicated to the promotion and protection of FoRB.

***Panel 2: Promoting ethical leadership at all levels, investing in education for peace***

There is a positive correlation between education, ethical leadership, and peaceful, just and equitable societies. Ethical leadership, which is based on values of inclusion, equality, respect, integrity, trust, accountability and solidarity, is grounded in service for the common good. It goes to the very heart of the mandate of parliamentarians and parliaments, who represent the people and are expected to deliver on their expectations and needs. Ethical leadership also applies to the mandate of leaders of religions and beliefs, whose service to their communities is guided by a value system. Peace education highlights many of the same competencies manifested in ethical leadership, such as promoting positive social values, democracy, intercultural and interfaith understanding, critical thinking and values of inclusion, respect and sustainability. Peace education, especially when it focuses on religious literacy, human rights literacy and media literacy, builds resistance to disinformation, intolerance and stereotyping, and promotes respect for the rule of law. It can help to prevent the occurrence of conflict, resolve conflicts peacefully, or create social conditions conducive to peace. The panel will discuss the key components of ethical leadership and peace education.

***Panel 3: Interfaith dialogue for the inclusion of women in public life***

Parliaments, religions and beliefs share a commitment to building resilient and inclusive societies. In recent years, this has extended to efforts to advance the inclusion of women in political and religious spheres. Significant gains have been made worldwide in increasing the numbers of women in parliament: from 13.1% in the year 2000, to 27% as of January 2025. Measures such as quotas, dedicated caucuses and gender-sensitivity tools, in addition to public education and the social will to improve women's representation in political institutions, have proven particularly effective. Women are also heavily involved in lay work essential to the running of religious or belief institutions, and religions and beliefs have differing theological stances on women's participation in public life. This panel will discuss the important role of women both in politics and as religious or belief actors, consider some of the gender-specific challenges they face, and identify context-appropriate practices to overcome them.

***Panel 4: Fostering solidarity and action for people in vulnerable situations***

Minorities, migrants, refugees, and displaced and stateless persons are some of the most vulnerable in our societies, often subject to multiple levels of marginalization, including facing barriers to accessing their rights, and experiences of social exclusion, discrimination and misrepresentation. Faith-based organizations are important providers of humanitarian support, driven by an imperative to serve those in need. They are also important contributors of social welfare provision and are active in social justice advocacy. Faith actors play important roles in meeting peoples' spiritual as well as material needs, while religious sites are often viewed as safe spaces for people in vulnerable or marginalized situations. The important role played by faith actors in fostering solidarity and action for people in vulnerable situations make them valuable dialogue partners for politicians when it comes to understanding the needs of these communities and developing relevant policies. This panel will consider the different roles, responsibilities and opportunities for parliamentarians, religious or belief representatives and faith-based organizations to foster solidarity for people in vulnerable situations, secure their rights and counter intolerance towards them.