



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue: *Working together for our common future*

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Kingdom of Morocco
The Parliament

Draft Concept Note

The world is at a turning point in history. It is confronted with existential threats and multiple major crises, including the climate emergency, unsustainable overconsumption and the plundering of resources, spiking inequality, as well as growing intolerance driving xenophobia and bigotry towards other groups. The ongoing struggles for gender equality are suffering new setbacks. The global youth population is growing exponentially whilst lacking mechanisms to fully participate in society. Oppressive regimes are curtailing civil rights and physical and ideological wars rage world-wide. Waves of suffering and displacement emerge as a collective result.

Our own future, which is intertwined within these various fragile, complex and interconnected systems, hangs in the balance, and immediate and concerted action is required. In this spirit, parliamentarians and religious actors¹ who share the common goal of serving their communities and promoting their wellbeing, could be valuable allies.

Parliaments are the guardians of the rule of law, human rights and justice in societies, through their key functions in law-making, budgeting, representation and oversight. There is a strong correlation between peace, justice and strong institutions, as reinforced by Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16), and parliaments stand at this nexus.

Religion and belief constitute an important dimension of the identity, values and decision-making processes of individuals and communities. They can influence how people participate in society, how they exercise their civic and political rights, and how they view their allegiance to the state. Religious institutions are often important service providers in the areas of education, social welfare and humanitarian aid. In some contexts, religion and belief are also reflected in political and other governance structures. They are an integral part of the social fabric of all societies – albeit in different ways.

Involving religion and belief in dialogue has emerged as an important avenue to address common challenges, especially those with an ideological or identity-based dimension. Dialogue between religions and beliefs can take a number of forms:

- *Interfaith* dialogue, which engages with people from different religious backgrounds
- *Intra-faith* dialogue, which engages with people from different traditions within the same religious community
- *Inter-belief* dialogue, which engages with people with different world views, including those who do not hold any belief or are not affiliated to any specific tradition.

These dialogues are largely based on respect for the other, the acceptance of difference and on the premise that what unites us is stronger than what divides us. The base line of all dialogue is that respect should be extended to all participants and building this is an important entry point into different types of cooperation.

An important area in which parliaments and religion and belief intersect is their common interest in building resilient societies, where all members of society feel included. Here, it is important to navigate between ensuring that rule of law is maintained, as the basis of strong institutions, while guaranteeing that the rights and freedoms of citizens, regardless of their religion or belief, are upheld. Where this balance exists, the different spheres of authority – secular and religious – can exist in harmony.

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¹ Under religious actors we understand: religious leaders, faith-based organizations or other organizations that engage actively in religious issues, and religious scholars.

The *Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue* will bring together political and religious leaders, along with representatives of faith-based and civil society organizations, think tanks, research bodies, scholars of religion and belief and subject matter experts, to engage in dialogue and share good practices around some of the key issues threatening societies worldwide which engage both the religious and political spheres. They will jointly explore action points aimed both at alleviating issues standing in the way of sustainable co-existence and at promoting respectful and inclusive societies and a more peaceful and just world.

Main objectives of the Conference

As the international organization of the Parliaments of sovereign States, the IPU for many decades has been providing a unique and inclusive platform for parliamentarians of all nationalities, faiths and beliefs to work together addressing the major challenges confronting our world. The IPU has worked to build bridges of dialogue and understanding, and help forge conditions conducive to peace, democracy and sustainable development. More recently, in line with its new Strategy, the IPU has been seeking to incorporate a wider, evolving, systems-based view of the actors, interactions and dynamics that influence parliaments and parliamentarians.

The IPU has addressed issues of inclusion, coexistence and peace in its Assembly declarations, publications and activities. The 2012 Quebec City Declaration on [*Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*](#) recognized the importance of balancing respect for diversity with social inclusiveness and cohesion as a means of building trust within and among societies and as a precondition for progress, prosperity and a high quality of life. The 2017 St. Petersburg Declaration on [*Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue*](#) recognized that dialogue with faiths, cultures and ethnicities is essential to peace and cultural pluralism and that, as representatives of the people, the world's parliaments are committed to strengthening normative processes and legal frameworks.

The *Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue* will take previous work on interfaith dialogue one step further, framing this dialogue as essential not only to peace and inclusion, but as part of a collective approach *necessary* for saving our planet.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for political and religious leaders, international experts and organizations to share good practices and take stock of the various initiatives which aim, in a holistic manner, to address some of the major threats confronting the world.

The Conference will therefore aim to:

- Celebrate cultural and religious diversity in all its forms.
- Help combat all forms of discrimination, related intolerance, hatred, extremism and acts of violence against people on the basis of their ethnicity, skin colour, religion or belief.
- Promote the inherent dignity and human rights of all individuals, including through freedom of religion or belief, gender equality, youth empowerment, as well as the protection of national minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- Reaffirm and consolidate our common values and principles of peace, humanity, fraternity and cooperation between cultures, religions and nations.
- Emphasize education and science as an important foundation for peace and as a means to combat the various forms of intolerance.
- Encourage genuine and effective dialogue and cooperation between political and religious leaders and other actors, with a view to translating shared values and principles of mutual respect and acceptance of differences into national policies and religious teachings.