



Inter-Parliamentary Union

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St. Petersburg Declaration on *Promoting cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue*

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We, Members of Parliament from 158 countries, meeting in St. Petersburg on the occasion of the 137th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, recognize that interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue is fundamental for peace and cultural pluralism.

In October 2012, the IPU adopted the Quebec City Declaration on *Citizenship, identity and linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalized world*. By so doing, we 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 sine qua non for progress, prosperity and a high quality of life.

We underscored the fact that all individuals must be allowed the full enjoyment of their equal and inalienable rights recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights and humanitarian law treaties and standards, and that they should not be subject to discrimination on any grounds including culture, race, colour, language, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, or political affiliation. Five years down the line, the principles enshrined in the Quebec City Declaration remain as valid and relevant as ever.

As the past few decades have shown, cultural and religious diversity does not in and of itself guarantee peace and global acceptance of differences. National authorities and other key stakeholders must work together to build inclusive societies and combat the dissemination of divisive discourses which can give rise to feelings of insecurity among certain groups and can encourage the spread of nationalism, extremism and terrorism.

As representatives of the people, we should not only lead by example, but also by direct contact with people at the national and regional level. Transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law and international human rights law should guide our relationships with cultural stakeholders and religious leaders. We have the obligation to pursue a global model of sustainable and peaceful diversity in order to effectively tackle intolerance, mistrust and violence.

As parliamentarians, we commit to working towards cultural pluralism and peace through interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue by:

Strengthening normative processes and legal frameworks:

- Ensure that national legislation is fully in line with the core international human rights instruments, as well as with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities;
- Adopt legislative measures to protect and promote the identity of national, cultural, linguistic, religious or ethnic groups and their rights to live in community with others;
- Strengthen mediation processes at the national and global level as well as interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue to address ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts and foster trust between members of a multicultural society.

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Making parliaments more representative and effective institutions:

- Introduce policies to ensure MPs are more representative of society in terms of gender, age, language, religion and ethnicity, including through the adoption of affirmative measures and provisions to guarantee that national minorities hold at least one seat in parliament and can participate in legislative bodies;
- Require governments to include an impact assessment on religious and ethnic minorities when submitting draft legislation and national budgets to parliament, in accordance with the objective of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to leave no one behind;
- Create sufficient opportunities for parliamentary discussions and debates through, for example, the establishment of parliamentary committees or inter-parliamentary commissions on cultural pluralism and religious diversity, in order to better understand and solve social conflicts through parliamentary action;
- Ensure that measures taken to prevent violent extremism are in full compliance with international human rights law and are not based on stereotypes or misconceptions;
- Support the creation of safe spaces for dialogue and the establishment of inclusive platforms in terms of gender, age, culture and religion, where key stakeholders can discuss local, regional and national actions related to religious diversity and cultural pluralism;
- Guarantee that MPs representing religious and ethnic minorities form part of national delegations attending international fora and deliberations, in particular IPU Assemblies and events.

Preventing human rights violations relating to culture and religion:

- Allocate sufficient resources to conduct awareness-raising activities on cultural and religious issues among law enforcement officers so as to strengthen their ability to identify and investigate hate crimes, in line with international standards and protocols;
- Build the capacity of outreach workers and mediators in order to create peaceful and trusting environments at the local and regional levels;
- Ensure that the legislative process is transparent, and that parliamentary records are made available and accessible so that religious and ethnic minorities can understand and follow the activity of MPs and hold them accountable for their actions;
- Design protection measures for all religious and ethnic minorities within the national territory, including non-citizens, migrants and newly arrived minorities.

Building social dialogue for multicultural and inclusive societies:

- Exercise effective budgetary oversight so as to prevent the funding of projects and organizations that promote hate and intolerance, openly combat hate speech in public discourse and online platforms, and support projects with a greater balance in terms of gender, culture and religion, particularly at local and regional levels, including through mixed housing areas, collective events and multicultural media;
- Collaborate with scientists on cultural and religious matters and work in partnership with local religious leaders to assess social challenges, such as the struggle against fundamentalism, and ensure that religious and cultural interpretations respect the human rights of all people, in particular women, young people and ethnic and religious minorities;
- Take concrete action to eliminate structural or systemic discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, including by implementing processes for the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by gender, age, language, ethnicity, religion, and other minority status.

Focusing on civic education and improving interpersonal skills:

- Promote the teaching of soft skills and human rights education at all levels of education, including the importance of religious pluralism and cultural diversity;
- Establish a national network on diversity comprising academic and professional experts in order to share best practices and successful diversity experiences and independently monitor the implementation of public policies;
- Enhance the role of science, promote holistic approaches and comparative methods in order to better explain globalization processes and their impact, and support ongoing training on religious pluralism and cultural diversity for public officials, including local authority workers and police officers.

Promoting international cooperation:

- Support international programmes that encourage interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue as well as projects to combat segregation and social fragmentation;
- Foster parliamentary diplomacy to address interfaith and inter-ethnic conflicts;
- Encourage interfaith initiatives aimed at building bridges and better understanding between communities;
- Consider holding a world conference on the interfaith and inter-ethnic dialogue, which could be organized together with the United Nations and with the participation of Heads of State, Speakers of Parliament and leaders of world religions.

We fully acknowledge that we have the means to make a difference. We therefore pledge to implement the recommendations listed above and call on the IPU to monitor the application of this Declaration.