

## Parliamentary Conference on Interfaith Dialogue in Rome: “Strengthening trust and embracing hope for our common future”

Katherine Marshall

Relationships between governments and religious communities take diverse forms in different countries, ranging from virtual theocracies to those that are purposefully secular. A common feature nonetheless has been a focus on executive branches of governments. Thus an ambitious meeting on interfaith dialogue in Rome June 19-21, hosted by the Interparliamentary Union (IPU), the Italian Senate, and the global interfaith organization, Religions for Peace, broke some new ground by focusing on the legislative branches, primarily at central government levels, but with some consideration of regional and local governments. The Rome gathering was a second event on the topic led by [IPU](#); the previous, first, meeting was in Marrakech, Morocco, in June, 2023. Apart from peace and social harmony as cross cutting themes, the Rome event focused on the importance of addressing people living in vulnerable situations, religious literacy, and religious freedom. The event culminated in an audience with Pope Leo XIV, linking the event to the Vatican’s focus on 2025 as a Jubilee year. The [IPU prepared a background paper](#) to support the event, and a product was the [Rome Communiqué](#), which set out commitments to action and follow up.

This [Zenit article](#) and the [IPU's announcement](#) and the program give some of the basic facts about the event, as does the [IPU summary](#). The photograph highlights its grandeur (in the Italian Parliament complex): almost 700 participants from about 100 countries; a wide variety of participants from governments, religious organizations, international NGOs, and academia, as well as parliamentarians participated. One note: among 181 member parliaments/congresses etc. that are IPU members, the United States is NOT included; attendance by Americans was limited, though the topic of what's happening today in the US and its global impact was at the forefront as well as the backdrop of discussions throughout.

The audience with Pope Leo XIV on June 21 brought together a larger group- perhaps 1000 people at the Vatican—and it included Italy's Prime Minister and other leading political figures. [His address](#), in English, focused on three topics: attention to the vulnerable, religious freedom and natural law, and AI.

Participants included David Saperstein, Mohammed Elsanousi (as part of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom--USCIRF and the Peacebuilders Network), Esben Larsen (now at the World Bank, focused on the Pandemic Fund), and Khushwant Singh (leader of PaRD). Religions for Peace leadership was a central part of the organization. From Georgetown University, Peter Mandaville and I were part of several program elements.

I spoke at three sessions:

### (a) *Thematic working session 2: Lessons from the Marrakesh Declaration:*

This session focused on follow up to the 2016 Marrakech Declaration and its focus on upholding the rights of religious minorities. It was organized by the IPU, with support from Religions for Peace, the Abu Dhabi Peace Forum and the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

Moderator: - Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Commissioner

Panelists: - Sheikh Al-Mahfoudh Bin Bayyah, Abu Dhabi Forum for Peace

Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Board Member of the G20 Interfaith Forum

Mr. Robert Amuma Madubi, Founder of Badili Tana Initiative (Kenya)

(b) A side event on religious literacy for parliamentarians. Peter Mandaville and I will do a separate note on this interesting discussion and follow up.

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

Moderator: - Ms. Claire Thomas, Executive Director of Minority Rights Group Panellists:

Mr. Gerardo Fernández Noroña, President of the Senate of Mexico

Katherine Marshall, Senior Fellow, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, Board Member of the G20 Interfaith Forum

Ms. Michèle Bowe, Head of the Representative Office of the Sovereign Order of Malta to the State of Palestine

Mr. Khushwant Singh, Head of Secretariat, International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development

Priestess Beatriz Schulthess, President, Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Spiritual Council (Costa Rica) and member of the UNHCR-Religions for Peace Multi-religious Council of Leaders

Pope Leo XIV's speech on June 21 brought a sharp focus to several issues for the conference and also for the Jubilee year. Especially in the context of the coming G20 Interfaith Forum, I was struck by his sharp focus on people living in vulnerable communities:

"The first concerns your responsibility to promote and protect, independent of any special interest, the good of the community, the common good, particularly by defending the vulnerable and the marginalized. This would mean, for example, working to overcome the unacceptable disproportion between the immense wealth concentrated in the hands of a few and the world's poor (cf. Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum*, 15 May 1891, 1). Those who live in extreme conditions cry out to make their voices heard, and often find no ears willing to hear their plea. This imbalance generates situations of persistent injustice, which readily lead to violence and, sooner or later, to the tragedy of war. Sound politics, on the other hand, by promoting the equitable distribution of resources, can offer an effective service to harmony and peace both domestically and internationally."