

KAMRA TAD-DEPUTATI



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARLAMENT TA' MALTA

L-Ispeaker

The Speaker

**PROMOTING CULTURAL PLURALISM AND PEACE THROUGH
INTER-FAITH AND INTER-ETHNIC DIALOGUE**

Speech delivered by

**Honourable Dr Angelo Farrugia,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Parliament of Malta**

at the

**High Level Segment for Speakers of Parliament
of the 137th IPU Assembly**

**St. Petersburg
Russia**

Excellency Saber Chowdhury, President of the IPU

Colleagues

Honourable Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning/afternoon

On this occasion, I chose to specifically address the theme of religious tolerance and peaceful co-existence in an inter-faith society.

Every Church in the world has the duty to seek peace. The Constitution of the Republic of Malta, the country where I come from, asserts that the religion of the state is the Roman Catholic Apostolic Religion. Malta is indeed predominantly Catholic, but Malta is also a tolerant nation and where those belonging to different, or no faith, live peacefully, respecting the cultural and religious diversity which surrounds them. Despite being a relatively homogenous society, one can find places of worship for a considerable number of faiths and denominations. This open society also made it possible for the country to embrace the large influx of both legal and irregular migrant reaching our island. Malta's demographics and society in general have been influenced by this ethnically diverse influx of immigrants and the government of Malta has just announced that it will be launching an action plan together with stakeholders to facilitate their integration in the coming year, which will be discussed in parliament in the coming days.

As legislators, we need to make sure that discrimination is adequately tackled in our national laws. The human spirit is a blank slate at birth upon which experience imprints knowledge. That is the Tabula Rasa philosophy. No one is born intolerant with prejudice in their hearts. Hate is learned and politicians must do everything in their power to outlaw discrimination and bigotry, while promoting a culture which embraces inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue. Furthermore, politicians must act to raise awareness not only on the rights and obligations relating to diversity, but also on the benefits, spearheading the development of equality policies in order to achieve real change in the area of anti-discrimination laws.

Colleagues,

There are hundreds of religions in the world – many of them surely represented here today – but we only have one world in which to co-exist. All religions have a core set of values that are identified with human morals, which can be considered as universally good. A multicultural society where everyone's rights are respected is a harmonious society. A multicultural society where everyone's differences are celebrated is a healthy society. Politicians must lead by example, and for this reason we must be more attentive on how we engage the public on these issues.

Religion should not be construed as the *raison d'être* of conflict and war. We live in a time where many people try to deceive others by claiming that the road to peace is paved with the denunciation of religion. This is not the case. Terrorism has no religion. Inter-faith couples are a clear example of that. Inter-faith marriages are the living evidence that religion is not the source of conflict. On the contrary, they show us how dialogue and love is indeed possible between different religions, a phenomenon which in Malta is being increasingly observed. This is why schools should be encouraged to teach inter-faith understanding through the acceptance of different religions. Religious literacy helps us move from tolerance to respect.

Religions and denominations are themselves diverse and evolving over time; however, their spiritual foundation remains uniform and universal.

This is not to say that Inter-faith dialogue is not difficult and at times challenging. It has to do with the difference between the particular and the universal. Every authentic spiritual path is an avenue to a shared universal but that universal is far greater than any particular path. By professing inter-faith dialogue, we commit ourselves to share valuable lessons arising from our traditions focused on unconditional respect for each other. This is the key that can enable us address those areas of taboo within each of our religious traditions which are inconsistent with those core teachings.

The values upon which religions are founded are universal and do not divide, but unite.