

Hon. Mrs. Irène Kälin,
Members of Parliament,
Excellences,
ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address you today in this historic building. I would like to begin by thanking all the Members of Parliament present for their warm welcome and for sponsoring this kind of event. At the same time, allow me to express my appreciation to the patronat and the organizing committee of the Swiss Federal Prayer Luncheon for organizing this gathering. It is a unique occasion to focus on peace and the responsibility that each of us have to preserve it.

I would like to begin by saying that I speak to you in my personal capacity, and not as a senior official of the United Nations. I do so acknowledging that this is a meeting of like-minded friends that come together to recognize the need for dialogue and reconciliation, in order to create a world where peace is not only preserved but is also passed as a fundamental societal value to the next generation. And, I speak to you knowing that we live through one of the most complicated periods in our contemporary history.

Experts in politics and diplomacy argue that we have today 3 rings of power and influence in the world, 3 new poles of power competing with each other or aligning in a way that challenges peace. Those experts see the USA, Russia, and China as the main actors that could influence our future in ways that we have not seen before.

This difficult historic period sees conflict on the rise, with the war in Ukraine as only one of many conflicts that somehow we have gotten accustomed to see in the news, night after night, day after day. I believe that Multilateral Diplomacy is under the threat of Nationalism in a manner that is exacerbated by the rise of social media and populism. In this context, the global fight against poverty was diverted because of the global pandemic of the last two years, in ways that we could have not predicted. The poor remains poor and the unemployed remains unemployed. We should ask ourselves what is happening in developing nations with weak health and education systems, with shortages of food, with debt and inflation. The war in Ukraine brought to the surface the issue of energy security & food security in a harsh and urgent manner that makes us reevaluate how safe our future really is. Things are indeed complicated.

Now, as a simple observer of International affairs I also believe that this multipolar world also brings opportunities for peace-building in a fashion that requires understanding the urgency of political dialogue that avoids confrontation. It brings urgency to a debate that yields public policy that delivers for the citizenry. Today the citizen is informed in real-time and wants solutions almost immediately. The Westphalian nation-state model is becoming obsolete and national boundaries are becoming less clear than in the preceding centuries. After all, was the Coronavirus pandemic a global health crisis that did not recognize borders, boundaries and sovereign territories?

However, we must recognize that in this global context the United Nations remains relevant and able to deliver solutions to these problems, but with reduced resources and with an ever-growing mandate. And as one of its newest but most influential members, Switzerland remains an important actor that must preserve its neutrality. It is because of countries like Switzerland that multilateral diplomacy remains vital in a difficult world. It is because of the work of its institutions, including this Parliament, that this nation remains engaged in global affairs and willing to work hard to preserve peace in the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I have had the privilege of working in international affairs and diplomacy for more than a decade, after serving as a senior government official in my home country of Ecuador, in South America. I learnt early on in my career in the public sector that leadership is to be grounded in values and that values are to be cemented by faith. As I talk as a simple citizen of the world, I can share with you my personal conviction that our Judeo-Christian values and our faith in God are fundamental to build peace and ensure that the concept of “Loving your Neighbour” becomes a reality in our individual lives. This concept is to also permeate into the institutions that we have built through centuries in the Western World. After all, why do we have governments if not to make sure that the weak and the vulnerable are protected and nurtured, included and strengthened?

But, when I speak of faith in our societies I must mention that while I remain a Christian and a loyal follower of Jesus Christ, peoples of other faiths are also to be included in the political debate and the political process that produce the kind of society that we all yearn for. It is well known that all major religions promote and embrace peace. It is well known that all faiths command its followers to cater to the needy and the disadvantaged. In that light, Switzerland is a welcoming and inclusive

nation that does exactly that: it calls all its citizens to demonstrate solidarity and to care for everyone in their territory. It is a nation that has welcome the refugee and the migrant. It is a nation that has maintained its neutrality through hundreds of years. The concept of “Loving Your Neighbour” was given to us in Galilee twenty centuries ago, but remains relevant today in every Swiss city.

The theme of this event is

“Education and Reconciliation - our contribution in a divided world”. I would like to address it based on my realization that education is a life-long quest. A journey that is not only intellectual but also spiritual. I say so based in my conviction that we have to do our best to promote education that builds peace, in a manner that shows who we really are. However, the question arises: how much knowledge does a human being need in order to be -to remain- effective in a world that needs reconciliation in the face of permanent conflict?

My answer is simple and is taken from my Holy Book, the Bible. It is included in the Gospel of Mark, in chapter 12. It says: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandments greater than these.” My answer implies that the most important knowledge we could ever acquire should come from the Bible. It should emanate from our faith in God and our love of the Creator. My answer goes beyond the rational and the intellectual reasoning. It should recognize that our faith, values and convictions will guide our behavior. Education should begin there. Peace building must begin there.

Thank you.