

## UPF Asia-Pacific Webinar Addresses Need to Reduce Polarization

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**Bangkok, Thailand** – The International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP), a UPF initiative, organized an international webinar on May 20, 2026, under the theme "The Role of Parliamentarians in Reducing Polarization: Advancing Unity Beyond National, Religious, Ethnic and Political Divides."

The event brought together distinguished parliamentarians, peace leaders, diplomats and participants from diverse regions to address the growing challenges of polarization and explore the role of parliamentarians in fostering peace, unity, democratic governance and social cohesion. A total of 140 participants from 21 countries registered, including 13 parliamentarians.

The webinar was moderated by **Mr. Santosh Kumar Paudel**, coordinator of IAPP–Asia Pacific, who welcomed all distinguished speakers and participants and emphasized the importance of dialogue and cooperation in overcoming political, religious, ethnic and ideological divisions. He highlighted the need for parliamentarians to work collectively to strengthen peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding in today's increasingly polarized world.

**Ms. Ursula McLackland**, president of UPF-Asia Pacific, expressed sincere appreciation to participants joining from different parts of the world despite the challenges of varying time zones. She noted that polarization is a global issue arising from political divisions, religious and racial motivations, and generational gaps. She stressed that peaceful conflict resolution depends on dialogue, mutual understanding, and respect, aiming for "win-win" solutions that address all grievances. Ms. McLackland further highlighted the role of UPF and IAPP as facilitators of open, heart-to-heart communication designed to build trust and foster cooperation among conflicting parties.

The keynote address was delivered by **Hon. Dan Burton**, global chairman of IAPP and former U.S. congressman. He thanked the founders and organizers of IAPP and UPF for their long-standing commitment to peacebuilding efforts around the world. He argued that wars only worsen economies and cause unnecessary loss of life, stressing that problems must instead be resolved through dialogue. He emphasized that peace requires moral leadership, trust, and the courage to build bridges rather than barriers, rejecting the notion that peace signifies weakness. According to Burton, true peace demands strength, wisdom and prioritizing humanity over politics, and he highlighted that parliamentarians are uniquely positioned to spread this message as they directly represent and communicate with their constituents.

**Dr. Michael Jenkins**, global coordinator of IAPP, expressed appreciation for the growing involvement of parliamentarians in the global peace movement. He shared that IAPP has established strong parliamentary networks across Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East, including parliamentary offices in several African nations. He emphasized Asia's critical role in shaping future global peace and prosperity due to its vast population.

Dr. Jenkins identified the family as a central pillar of peace, noting that strong families instill loyalty, tradition and trust in children. Jenkins also highlighted the importance of coalitions of nations in leading the way to peace and influencing major powers such as the United States. Furthermore, he stressed the need to engage intentionally with diversity through forums and summits, which provide opportunities to embrace different cultures and foster peaceful coexistence.

**Mr. Larry Moffitt**, secretary general of UPF-North America, conveyed brief greetings and expressed gratitude to the organizers and participants for their commitment to peacebuilding and international cooperation. He appreciated the distinguished gathering and encouraged continued collaboration and future dialogue initiatives.

The first panel presentation was delivered by **Hon. Sir Iakoba Tacia Italeli**, speaker of the Parliament of Tuvalu and former governor-general of Tuvalu, who spoke extensively on the role of parliamentarians in reducing polarization and advancing unity. He described polarization as a defining challenge of the era that erodes trust in institutions and hinders development. He identified its root causes as economic inequality, identity politics, disinformation and unresolved historical grievances. To counter division, he proposed legislative measures such as inclusive laws protecting minority rights, equitable resource allocation, and educational curricula promoting tolerance. Mr. Italeli also advocated for cross-party caucuses and interfaith dialogue platforms as means to foster greater understanding and unity.

**Hon. Dave Akbarshah Fikarno Laksono**, vice chairman of Commission I of Indonesia's House of Representatives, presented the Indonesian perspective that unity is achieved not by eliminating differences but by managing them through mutual respect and inclusiveness. Using the humanitarian situation in Gaza as an example, he stressed that sustainable peace requires political will, tangible support, and adherence to international law rather than confrontation. He urged parliamentarians to lead by example, showing that disagreements should strengthen democratic dialogue instead of causing division, and emphasized parliamentarians' role in providing moral leadership that promotes social cohesion.

Drawing from Indonesia's experience, he highlighted diversity as a source of strength when managed with inclusiveness and shared commitment to the common good. Mr. Laksono also outlined Indonesia's consistent support for ceasefire efforts, humanitarian assistance and peaceful negotiation in international conflicts, underscoring that lasting peace can only be achieved through dialogue, communication and mutual understanding.

An interactive question-and-answer session followed, during which participants raised important questions concerning democracy and governance in developing countries, lessons from Sri Lanka's past conflicts, ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, freedom of expression and divisive political rhetoric, interfaith dialogue, grassroots representation, regional disputes such as the Cambodian–Thai border issue, Indonesia's role in promoting international peace, and global cooperation for improving the living standards of humanity. The active engagement from participants demonstrated strong international interest in promoting democratic governance, peaceful coexistence and international cooperation.

The webinar concluded with closing remarks by the moderator, who thanked all distinguished speakers, parliamentarians, organizers, and participants for their valuable contributions. The program reaffirmed the importance of ethical leadership, inclusiveness, democratic values, mutual respect, and international cooperation in building peaceful and resilient societies. Participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to exchange perspectives and strengthen collaborative efforts toward achieving a more peaceful, united and prosperous world for future generations.