



QATAR-SOUTH AFRICA
CENTRE FOR PEACE
AND INTERCULTURAL
UNDERSTANDING

Event summary and communiqué

**Qatar-South Africa Centre for Peace and Intercultural Understanding (CPIU) symposium:
*From the UN's Pact for the Future to Everyday Actions for Peace***



Bridging global diplomacy, academia, and local action, the Qatar-South Africa CPIU's inaugural symposium drew a crowd of over 100 persons, including diplomats, scholars, and students to explore how emerging powers, universities, and civil society can shape new pathways for peace, justice, and multilateral renewal in a time of global crisis and moral reckoning.

Introduction

Inspired by the United Nations' theme for its 80th anniversary, "Act Now for a Peaceful World", the Qatar-South Africa Centre for Peace and Intercultural Understanding (CPIU) at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) convened a symposium on the 6th of October 2025 entitled "From the UN's Pact for the Future to Everyday Actions for Peace". The event's audience of 115 in-person participants and 27 virtual attendees comprised of diplomats, academics, civil society leaders, and students, who came together to explore how multilateralism, middle-power diplomacy, and universities can translate global commitments to peace into concrete, everyday actions.

Representatives from several embassies and diplomatic missions were present, including those from the Netherlands and the European Union, as well as ambassadors from countries including Sudan and Türkiye, in addition to officials from South Africa’s Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO). The participation of these dignitaries underscored the symposium’s international reach and its emphasis on high-level diplomatic discourse. Deputy Heads of Mission and Deputy Chiefs were also present, providing critical support and ensuring continuity in diplomatic engagement.

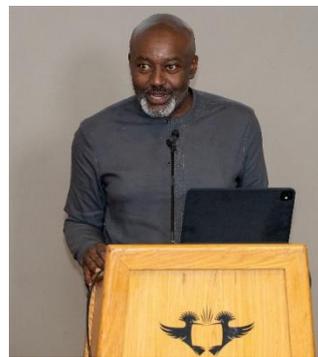


Opening Remarks

The event was opened by Professor Kammila Naidoo, the Executive Dean of UJ’s Faculty of Humanities, and His Excellency Ghulam Hoosein Asmal, South Africa’s ambassador to Qatar, who welcomed the event’s attendees and participants. In her address, Dean Naidoo’s address reminded attendees “that at a time when the global landscape is marked by profound challenges, conflict, inequality, insecurity, [and] the rise of authoritarianism amongst others”, it is absolutely vital that frameworks such as the UN’s Pact for the Future, which calls for multilateralism and collective action, “are translated into everyday choices, actions and policies at all levels of society”. To this end, she highlighted the crucial role that universities and academic institutions, who “have historically been key spaces of critical inquiry and innovation” as well as “incubators of civic responsibility and social activism” in supporting efforts by emerging powers such as Qatar and South Africa at peace building, conflict mediation and promoting intercultural dialogue.



His Excellency Ghulam Hoosein Asmal, South Africa’s ambassador to Qatar, set the tone of the symposium by reflecting upon the events of 2025, referring to the convergence of geopolitical, economic, and ecological crises facing the world. He explained that the erosion of democratic norms and rise of authoritarianism reflect a crisis of moral leadership, and that universities and civil society must take on the role of moral witnesses as they have been doing through global protests against the grave injustices currently befalling the people of Gaza. The Ambassador concluded his intervention by asserting the necessity for collaboration between emerging powers and academics to rebuild trust in multilateralism and amplify marginalized voices – a call that was reaffirmed repeatedly throughout the proceedings.



Symposium Overview and Objectives

The symposium was chaired by CPIU’s director, Professor Erin McCandless, who framed the discussion around what it means to act for peace in an era marked by geopolitical rivalry, impunity, declining trust in multilateralism, political polarisation, and widening global inequalities, highlighting three central questions for the symposium to contemplate:

1. What does “acting for peace” mean in an era of geopolitical rivalry, when multilateralism and universal agreements are under siege?
2. How are South Africa and Qatar as emerging powers advancing peace and security, through multilateral institutions and agreements such as the Pact for the Future, humanitarian and peace interventions, and other diplomatic means?
3. How can universities, through research, teaching, public speaking, publishing and activism, advance the aims of the Pact for the Future and develop alternative and complementary pathways to support peace and security?



Keynote Addresses

Subsequent interventions were presented by the symposium’s two keynote speakers, Mr Zaheer Laher, the Chief Director of DIRCO, and Mr Nelson Muffuh, the UN Resident Coordinator in South Africa. Mr Laher defined acting for peace as taking proactive diplomatic measures to prevent conflict and uphold international law, supporting UN reform, especially Security Council reform, to make global governance credible, and preserving international humanitarian law and ensuring accountability for violations. In doing so, he highlighted South Africa’s positive role in acting for peace by exercising moral and legal agency in attempting to halt human rights violations in Gaza through the International Court of Justice and in supporting the development of the UN’s Pact for the Future, which lists 56 actions required to make the UN “future proof”, particularly “amidst emerging threats to international peace and security, such as AI and technology that outpace individual efforts to address them”.



In his keynote address, Mr Muffuh reaffirmed Mr Laher’s framing of the issues at hand and praised South Africa’s peaceful transition and Qatar’s mediation efforts. Stating that peace is “not an abstract ideal but a daily necessity”, he focused his address on six necessary actions: recommitting to multilateralism and dialogue, translating global commitments into local actions, empowering youth and women in peace building, championing evidence-based policymaking, living peace values daily, and redirecting military spending towards sustainable development.



Mr Laher and Mr Muffuh's keynote addresses were followed by interventions from the symposium's four discussants, Professor Marie-Joëlle Zahar of UJ and the University of Montreal, Professor Sultan Barakat of Hamad bin Khalifa University in Doha, Ms Nudhara Yousef of the Global Governance Innovation Network and Princeton University, and Professor Tim Murithi of Stellenbosch University. Their interventions reasserted the necessity of defining peace in a way that centres justice and inclusivity, the vital role of universities and civil society in peace building and taking active stances to hold actors politically and legally accountable, the importance of South-South partnerships and collaborations to advance transformative change and peace, the value of strengthening the UN's humanitarian capacity and the absolute need for more equitable and fair global governance.

Discussant Contributions

A vibrant discussion session followed, in which scholars, analysts, and programme associates from local and international academic and civil society organisations participated, as well as deans, heads of departments, and students. The session, which highlighted the engagement of academia and the next generation of peace builders in advancing interdisciplinary dialogue, revolved around incisive questions relating to practical ways to engage in peace building beyond theory, the effectiveness of the UN amid manipulation from major powers, the possibility of broader policy-research collaborations, and the role to be played by students in promoting peace building and multilateralism.



Key Takeaways and Insights

Emergent takeaways from the symposium included:

1. **Emerging powers as principled actors:** South Africa and Qatar have demonstrated the capacity to act as leaders and bridge-builders capable of mediating global conflicts and hosting peace processes, creating space for dialogue, drawing upon legal, diplomatic and financial resources, and advancing innovative, inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches.
2. **Reimagining multilateralism:** Calls for Security Council reform, revitalized UN General Assembly power, and networked coalitions that transcend old North–South binaries as being central to renegotiating the role of multilateral actors in acting for peace.

3. **Universities as catalysts:** Higher education institutions can combat disinformation, foster civic engagement, and link research with community-based peace action.
4. **Everyday actions:** Beyond diplomacy, peace begins with inclusion, empathy, and solidarity in classrooms, communities, and civic spaces.
5. **Global South leadership:** Symposium participants speaking from African and Arab experiences of leading mediation and conflict resolution efforts demonstrate how the Global South is being repositioned as an intellectual and moral leader in shaping the future of global governance.



Conclusion

Overall, the symposium advanced CPIU’s mission to foster intercultural understanding and shape transformative approaches to peace. By convening policymakers, diplomats, scholars, and students, it bridged global dialogue with local action—linking critical reflection on geopolitical challenges and the roles of emerging powers with practical strategies for sustainable peace. The discussions exemplified CPIU’s core aims: to draw on the experiences of Qatar and South Africa, engage Global South perspectives, and promote research, education, and dialogue that address the root causes of conflict and injustice. In doing so, the symposium reinforced the Centre’s role as a platform for collaboration across governments, multilateral actors, and communities in advancing ethical, inclusive, and contextually grounded pathways to peace in a rapidly transforming world.

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