

2026 Luxembourg Peace Prize ceremony speech

Talia Smith

It's an honour to receive this Luxembourg Peace Prize on behalf of the many colleagues, volunteers and friends of Initiatives of Change — past and present — whose courage and commitment have made this work possible. This award belongs to all of them.

And this is truly a Legacy Award.

Our story began in the 1920s. In the 1930s, as nations across Europe rearmed for war, our movement became known as Moral Re-Armament — calling instead for moral and spiritual rearmament.

After the devastation of the Second World War, our focus increasingly turned toward reconciliation: helping former enemies rebuild trust and imagine a shared future.

In 2021, we became Initiatives of Change — or IofC — the heart of our work has remained the same.

For over a century, we have been guided by one simple but deeply challenging belief: that change starts with oneself. That societies change when people are willing to reflect honestly, and take responsibility for the role they can play in healing division.

Today, in a world marked by polarisation, fear and violence, this message feels more urgent than ever.

Peace is not built only through treaties or institutions. It is built in human relationships. It is built when people who distrust one another choose to listen instead of condemn. When communities acknowledge historical wounds instead of denying them. When people move from blame to responsibility.

This belief shapes all of IofC's work across more than 60 countries.

One example is our International Trustbuilding Program, launched in 2019 and grounded in decades of peacebuilding experience. The program addresses an overlooked driver of conflict today: the breakdown of trust — between communities, generations, institutions, and those who hold power.

Because where trust breaks down, fear grows. Polarisation grows. Violence grows. And yet trust can be rebuilt.

Through courageous dialogue, we have seen police officers and communities in Nigeria begin to rebuild understanding. We have seen interfaith dialogue strengthen relationships in Indonesia. We have seen trauma healing and reconciliation efforts grow in Burundi. In 14 countries and countless communities, we have witnessed people discover that those they once feared or blamed also carry pain, dignity and hope.

Again and again, we have learned something deeply human: when people are truly heard, transformation becomes possible.

None of this work is quick. Peacebuilding rarely is. It requires patience, humility and persistence. It asks us not only to change systems, but also ourselves.

And this award reminds us that this work matters.

So today, we accept this recognition with gratitude, and also with renewed responsibility — to continue building trust in places where fear and division take root; responsibility to create spaces for truth and healing; and responsibility to keep believing that peace is possible, even when the world feels fractured.

Thank you to the Schengen Peace Foundation for this recognition and for honouring those working to build peace across our world.