

A Review of Elder Ulisses Soares Comments at both the Global Faith Forum and the IRF Summit 2025

By Marianna Richardson

Elder Ulisses Soares, an apostle of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, spoke at both the Global Faith Forum and the International Religious Freedom Summit 2025 during the first week in February. During both speeches, Elder Soares reached out a hand of fellowship to all religious believers reiterating his Church's stance that we all must treat each other human dignity, which is the foundation of human rights and of the principle of religious freedom. Becoming a peacemaker is the message to the world of the Latter-day Saint Prophet, President Russell M. Nelson. This message was reiterated by Elder Soares during these meetings.

The Global Faith Forum

The Global Faith Form was a conference focused on gathering faith leaders and advocates who will unite around the shared values of dignity and respect for others in a world where discord persists. In a world faced with polarization and conflict, the purpose of the messages of this conference were to engage in meaningful dialogue, to form relationships, to share ideas, and to inspire actions that will transform the communities we live in. The three founders of this organization are Imam Mohamed Magid, Ambassador Rabbi David Saperstein and Pastor Bob Roberts, Jr.

Pastor Bob Roberts, Jr. led an informal conversation with Elder Soares on the large stage of the Washington Hilton Ballroom. Pastor Roberts started by talking about how he got to know the LDS people through his relationships with Brett Scharffs over freedom of religion issues and how it bridged the gap to his understanding of the LDS religion. Pastor Roberts stated that he knew that Elder Soares mattered to him and to God. He acknowledged that they would disagree about points of doctrine and asked for forgiveness if Elder Soares had ever been wounded by an evangelical.

Pastor Roberts asked Elder Soares the question, "What do you admire about Baptists?" Elder Soares responded that he admired your desire to share your testimonies of Christ and spread the word of Jesus Christ. He was impressed with your knowledge of the Bible and how you share what you know with others. Elder Soares said that he loved your purpose and commitment to follow Christ and in everything you do, Christ is the focus of your life.

Then, Pastor Roberts answered the question, too, about what he admired most about Latter-day Saints. He admires the fact that the LDS people are good people, that they serve other people around the world, and they emphasize the issue of religious freedom. Pastor Roberts stated that he loved the Latter-day Saints' spirit and heart.

The work of LDS missionaries was discussed. Elder Soares pointed out that these young people give up two years to eighteen months of their lives to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to people around the world. Retired senior couples also join in on the work of inviting others to follow Christ and His teachings.

Pastor Roberts invited Elder Soares to talk about temples. He explained that temples are sacred places of worship, and they are not places where we have regular Church activities. Instead, these are dedicated buildings to the Lord where only people who are faithful and have a special recommend may enter. Before a temple is dedicated, all may enter the temple and view the beauty and holiness of the building. He gave an invitation to all to visit the open house for the Salt Lake City Temple in 2026.

The IRF Summit 2025

At the International Religious Summit (IRF), Elder Soares gave a formal speech as a main plenary speaker. He expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to speak during an important time marked by the new U.S. presidential administration and World Interfaith Harmony Week. He emphasized that the purpose of this week is to foster interreligious dialogue, promote mutual understanding, and build a culture of peace.

He shared his heartfelt support for those experiencing persecution, urging them to hold on to hope and not let their faith be weakened. He quoted Pope Francis, who encouraged perseverance in charity and peaceful striving for justice and religious freedom. To illustrate the power of faith and resilience, Elder Soares recounted the story of Corrie Ten Boom, who despite being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, found strength and purpose through her faith. The presence of fleas in their barracks, initially seen as a burden, ultimately provided the women the freedom to worship and share their faith without interference from their prison guards.

He highlighted the importance of human dignity as the foundation of human rights, stating that societies thrive when they recognize, respect, and protect the inherent value of every person. Elder Soares emphasized that dignity is a universal birthright that transcends religion, race, gender, and nationality. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights underscores the importance of dignity as the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace. He urged the audience to uphold these rights universally, as justice must not be subjected to those in power.

Elder Soares spoke about the role of compassion in fostering religious freedom, defining it as a sympathetic consciousness of others' distress combined with a desire to alleviate it. Compassion, he explained, enables people to see themselves in one another and to recognize shared dreams, hopes, fears, and suffering. He encouraged the audience to practice compassion daily and to let it guide their efforts for greater religious freedom worldwide.

Religious freedom matters because religion itself plays a crucial role in society. Prayers, meditations, and religious rituals dignify important moments in people's lives and provide a framework for meaning, belonging, and identity. Religion also fosters civic involvement and neighborly virtues, as highlighted in a sociological study titled, "American Grace." This research shows that religious people are more generous neighbors and dedicated citizens compared to their secular counterparts.

Elder Soares concluded by emphasizing that religious freedom must be rooted in principles that foster moral individuals, encourage peace, and promote service to vulnerable communities. He urged the audience to continue their efforts in preserving religious liberty, recognizing the shared responsibility for each other's well-being. He underscored that the protection of sacred rights depends on a society that prioritizes cooperation and compassion and that human dignity and rights must be respected and preserved for all people.