Parliamentary Leadership Promoting Peace and Development in the Age of Innovation and Technological Change

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am privileged to address you at the 139th Inter Parliamentary Union Assembly today. I would like to express my profound gratitude to all the organizers of the conference for the opportunity given to me to address this distinguished gathering.

A new wave of technology is driving rapid global change. Spectacular advances in science and technology over the last five decades have the entire world. This rapid change has created innovative opportunities for the IPU member countries in the areas of sustainable development, state –society relations, peace and conflict, international security and global governance. Peace and development in the age of innovation and technological change is a timely topic. The United Nations have come a long way in integrating new technologies into its discussions and work on peace and harmony. The 2000 UN Millennium Declaration, which laid out goals for a more peaceful, prosperous, and just world, contained a commitment to "*ensure that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies are available to all*."

New technologies also offer new opportunities for managing conflict and building peace, particularly at the local level. Beyond assisting in conflict resolution, participatory data collection and processing tools can empower communities to resist violence and recover after conflicts. However, in peace building, too, these technologies may bring risks at times. Access to new technologies is often uneven and can be manipulated by persons and authorities causing users to face privacy and security risks. ICTs provide opportunities to collect data about crimes and conflict which could be used to find early solutions.

Parliament is the best and foremost place to promote peace and development in this digital age. It facilitates participation of citizens in the governance process through their elected representatives. The NESTA, which is a global innovation foundation, has stated that new experiments are showing how digital technologies can play a critical role in engaging new groups of people, empowering citizens and forging a new relationship between cities and local residents, and parliamentarians and citizens. Therefore, it is evident that in the 21st century, technology is interlinked with peace and development.

In Sri Lanka, we have a vision to make synergies between science and technology for development. Sri Lanka's 'Vision 2025' policy provides a framework to develop strategies that

encourage the use of digital and other modern technologies to become globally competitive and drive the nation towards a digitally empowered economy. We have taken steps to use ICT in every sector including economy, education, health, and environment. I am proud to say that recently the Government initiated 'Enterprise Sri Lanka Programme' to enhance the economy in order to achieve the Government's medium-term targets such as per capita income of USD 5,000, one million new jobs, doubling exports, achieving and maintaining more than five percent GDP growth etc . The programme is also focusing on the development of technology and technical and managerial skills which have also been identified as an important constraint affecting SME and Micro sector development.

I wish to sate at this juncture that, science and technology has a pivotal role to play in the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, through research and development, innovations and inventions. I should stress that the Goal 16 of the SDGs focuses on building peaceful, just, and inclusive societies. Furthermore, we must understand that there can be no sustainable peace without the Rule of Law. In this regard the essence of Sustainable Development Goal 16 to promote the Rule of Law and provide access to justice. It is important to note that development strategies of countries are geared to respond to opportunities and challenges in view of the rapid technological changes that are taking place in the world such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, robotics, Artificial Intelligence (AI), solar space technology, etc. As we are working towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, mobilizing these emerging technologies will have a significant impact in achieving the targets envisioned in SDGs including industrial innovation, sustainable production, improving health and education of societies while leaving no one behind.

Moreover, I strongly believe that women are important agents for creating stability in the lives of their families and to promote reconciliation and peace even under very difficult and traumatic situations. However, women's peace building potential has had no significant impact on policies and decisions relating to conflicts because of their absence from the decision-making processes and bodies in the region. Women empowerment is crucial is achieving all development goals since they can contribute a lot to the economy and society. ICT has great potential to enable women's economic empowerment which would stimulate growth. According to the Department of Census and Statistics, in Sri Lanka, female computer literacy rate was 26.1 per cent, in 2017. Computer literacy among male was 30.7 per cent. These trends show that women's participation in the information technology is lagging behind that of men. Supporting women's participation

in the age of innovation has direct positive impacts on gender equality as well as economic development in a country.

We believe that effective Science Technology and Innovation (STI) policies and strategies can help societies to prepare for the rapid technological change while providing adequate rewards for the professional community to facilitate those policies and strategies. We note that there is a significant gap between the developed and developing countries in this regard such as inadequate funding and resources and industrial infrastructure, knowledge gap and brain drain. etc.

I would like to mention here that Parliament of Sri Lanka is now using new technology to enhance its key functions and uphold the e-parliament concept. Further, Members of Parliament share information by using ICT applications and interact with the citizens. These applications provide information to citizens about ongoing parliamentary work. The citizens' input in the legislative process too can be obtained. In Sri Lanka, the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) helped the Parliament to apply ICT in the Parliamentary work. To create an e-chamber, computer portals have been fixed in front of the seats of every member in the Parliament to access the internet and the Parliamentary information service. In order to gain easily and quickly the updated information and other documents relevant to the chamber activities they are published in the Parliament website, Moreover, telecasting Parliament's activities on a special TV channel helps to create awareness among the people. Thus, they are well-informed on Parliamentary matters. We are proud to state that IPU has recognized Sri Lanka Parliament as a Model Parliament in the South Asian region.

Finally, I believe that the international cooperation is necessary to foster peace and development through science and technology, especially in terms of sharing expertise, improving human resources, facilitating research and providing pathways for effective transfer of information. In this regard, we welcome the 'Science for Peace Schools'' launched by the IPU and CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research) which is aimed at creating a link between the fields of science and politics , to build peace among nations through scientific cooperation.

In conclusion, I would like to request that all Parliaments should make maximum effort to promote peace and development through science and technology in this modern era.

Thank you!