

Statement by the Hon'ble Speaker of the Parliament of Bhutan
149th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Geneva, Switzerland, 13-17 October 2024

Madam President, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I would like to convey to you the warm greetings of His Majesty the King and the People of Bhutan, alongside the fraternal sentiments of the Parliament of Bhutan.
2. Also, allow me to congratulate you, Madam President on your election. My delegation extends our best wishes to you and we would like to assure you of our full support as you steer us through the work of this Assembly. As we engage in our work, let us remember that our collective strength lies in our ability to nurture not just the well-being of our nations but the happiness of our people and the health of our planet. Together, we can forge a future that resonates with peace, sustainability, and hope.

Madam President,

3. The theme of this year's General Debate, "**Harnessing Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) for a More Peaceful and Sustainable Future,**" is most timely and relevant in an era where we see democracy under strain and conflicts on the rise. It is a call to harness the positive power of STI to address these global challenges and pave the way for a more harmonious and sustainable world.
4. As the world faces increasing conflicts, it is crucial to leverage STI to build societies that promote peace, well-being, and sustainability, as envisioned through Bhutan's lens of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which emphasises a balanced approach to development, ensuring that economic progress is aligned with environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and good governance.
5. The experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of science and technology in tackling global challenges while exposing disparities in access to these advancements, especially for small and developing countries like Bhutan. As we move forward, it is vital to harness STI in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and aligned with our collective goals for peace and sustainable development.
6. As a small, landlocked, and a developing country, Bhutan faces unique challenges. Nevertheless, our commitment to sustainable development, guided by our development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), has been unwavering.
7. Under the visionary leadership of His Majesty the King, Bhutan has been leveraging science and technology to achieve our developmental goals. From harnessing hydropower as a clean energy source to promoting digital literacy and innovation in governance, STI has been integrated into our national development plans and several significant initiatives have been taken to harness STI for sustainable development. For

instance, Bhutan launched the National Digital Identity (NDI) initiative on October 13, 2023, digital identity solution based on self-sovereign identity (SSI) and decentralised identifier (DID) technologies, ensuring secure and verifiable credentials while maintaining data privacy for Bhutanese citizens. The NDI aims to be inclusive, facilitating access across various demographics and promoting digital equity. Recently, Bhutan joined the Global Acceptance Network (GAN), becoming the first national digital identity ecosystem to do so, which allows for secure interconnectivity with global digital trust networks. These developments reflect Bhutan's ongoing efforts to establish a robust digital identity framework that supports its citizens and contributes to the country's vision of a Digital Drukylu, where technology fosters innovation and enhances the quality of life for all Bhutanese.

8. The National Science and Technology Policy fosters research, innovation, and STEM education, creating a supportive environment for scientific advancement. Investments are being made in Renewable Energy Projects, including hydropower, to achieve our goal of remaining a carbon-negative nation and promoting sustainable energy practices. The Bhutan Innovation and Technology Centre (BITC) serves as a hub for research, innovation, and entrepreneurship, supporting start-ups and technology-driven projects.
9. Various STEM Education Programs have also been implemented to enhance education in schools and universities through curriculum reforms, teacher training, and scholarships. The Climate Resilience and Environmental Monitoring efforts, using satellite technology and data analytics, address climate change impacts and develop resilience strategies. Additionally, the expansion of Health Technology and Telemedicine is improving healthcare access and quality, especially in remote areas.
10. The Parliament of Bhutan is actively embracing technology to enhance efficiency and sustainability through our e-Parliament initiative. Launched in 2020, the program utilises digital devices in the parliamentary hall for document sharing and session management, significantly reducing paper consumption. By transitioning to a paperless environment, we are promoting transparency and accessibility while also contributing to environmental sustainability. The adoption of digital platforms for communication and document sharing streamlines our parliamentary processes, reflecting our broader commitment to leveraging technology for good governance and sustainable development.
11. These initiatives reflect Bhutan's commitment to integrating technology with sustainable development while ensuring that ethical considerations guide our advancements.

Madam President,

12. In this context, the development of the IPU Charter on the Ethics of Science and Technology is a timely and essential initiative. Bhutan supports this Charter as it will provide a framework for ensuring that technological advancements are pursued with a strong ethical foundation, balancing innovation with respect for human rights and societal

values. Bhutan is dedicated to promoting responsible use of technology that respects human rights and societal values.

13. Further, the discussions of the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights on **"The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Democracy, Human Rights, and the Rule of Law"** are of critical importance. Artificial Intelligence (AI), while offering transformative potential, also poses risks to our democratic values, privacy, and human rights. Bhutan supports a balanced approach where the benefits of AI can be harnessed without compromising our ethical standards, democratic principles, and the rule of law. It is vital for us, as parliamentarians, to establish robust frameworks that govern AI and ensure its alignment with our societal values.
14. In these times of rapid change and uncertainty, the role of multilateralism and global cooperation has never been more crucial. The IPU, as a global platform for parliamentary dialogue, plays an essential role in fostering understanding, building consensus, and facilitating collective action on global issues. Bhutan remains committed to engaging constructively in these dialogues and working with all member states to promote peace, democracy, and sustainable development.
15. Bhutan also wishes to draw attention to the linkage between climate change and the use of technology. As a country highly vulnerable to climate change, we are experiencing melting glaciers, erratic rainfall, and frequent floods, and other climate related disasters, which affect our predominantly agrarian population. We recognize that technology and innovation must be leveraged to address these environmental challenges, mitigate climate impacts, and build resilience. We hope that our deliberations here will acknowledge the crucial role of STI in addressing climate-related challenges and ensuring sustainable development.
16. Bhutan's commitment to multilateralism is further reflected in its active participation in United Nations Peacekeeping (UNPK) operations, a journey that began in 2014. Despite being a small, landlocked nation with a population of less than 800,000, Bhutan has steadily contributed to peacekeeping missions by deploying Military Observers, Staff Officers, and Individual Police Officers as well as a full contingent. As of July 2024, we ranked as the 46th top troop contributing country out of 121. Our personnel have served in some of the most challenging peacekeeping environments. Additionally, the Bhutan UN Peacekeeping Training Centre, established in 2015, plays a critical role in preparing our peacekeepers with the skills and knowledge required for modern operations. Bhutan's contributions in its peacekeeping operations include a commitment to continuing to promote gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping; and the adoption by our Contingent of environmentally friendly measures such as the use of renewable solar energy for, and the use of green certified back-up generators to save energy and reduce their carbon footprint.

Madam President,

17. As we deliberate on the role of science, technology, and innovation in shaping our future, let us be guided by our shared values of equity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Bhutan, as always, stands ready to contribute to the global discourse and work collaboratively with all member states towards a more peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous world.

I look forward to a successful outcome from our discussions.

Thank you, and Tashi Delek!