

Speech by Denis Naughten TD

(Member of Parliament, Ireland and Chair of the IPU Working Group on Science and Technology)

to the 149th IPU Assembly

Harnessing science, technology and innovation (STI) for a more peaceful and sustainable future

15th October 2024

Colleagues,

I'm a Member of Parliament from Ireland, a windswept island in the North Eastern Atlantic Ocean.

I turned 50 last year, and for half of my life, I witnessed at least two deaths every week due to terrorism on our little island, based on the different Christian churches we worshipped in.

For the other half of my life, we have lived with a very fragile peace.

The primary technique that has helped maintain this peace over that time, is building relationships between neighbours, communities, and countries.

One of the tools we have used is science, as a universal, non-religious truth, to build new foundations upon which we can construct bridges of tolerance.

We used science not just at the policy and political level on our divided island, but also between our islands of Britain and Ireland.

Most importantly, we have used science at the citizen level because, regardless of where we live or what place we worship, we all breathe the same air and drink the same water.

Through cooperation, building trust, and maintaining our precious peace, I have seen firsthand how science has allowed neighbours to start talking to each other for the very first time, and more importantly, for their grandchildren to play together.

Science is the universal language that provides us all with a common platform to start impartial engagement.

The scientific method can establish robust facts and does not recognise borders.

Peace and science, though seemingly different, are deeply connected. Peace allows science to thrive, and science, in return, can lay the groundwork for lasting peace.

Promoting Access and Equity

But science can only help in building peace, if it is open, transparent and accessible.

Ensuring that everyone benefits from technological advancements is crucial, as highlighted by the UN Sustainable Development Goals' aim to "leave no one behind."

The digital divide during the COVID-19 pandemic exposed how unequal access to technology can worsen social inequalities, affecting education and healthcare.

This issue was only overshadowed by the unequal access to vaccines.

Therefore, we need a regulatory regime that promotes social justice, ensuring technological benefits are accessible to all, bridging the innovation divide and addressing social inequalities.

Every year, between 5 million and 7 million patents lapse, but there is no unified system to track these technologies. Once they lapse, they often disappear, despite many being innovative ideas that could be adapted and utilised globally.

One recommendation from the Inter-Parliamentary Union Science for Peace Schools is to create a repository of water solutions and best practices, including lapsed patents.

This knowledge base should be accessible in both developing and developed countries to address their unique water challenges.

Most of our governments are signatories of the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS).

Article 66.2 of this agreement addresses the facilitation of knowledge transfer, placing a responsibility on those who hold that knowledge to facilitate its transfer, particularly to those parts of the world that could benefit from such innovation.

To fulfil this in practical terms, this requires flexibility in supporting the development of a viable technology base in the Global South and clear incentives for knowledge transfer.

To date, this global agreement is underutilised, despite the responsibility on countries holding patents to facilitate their transfer to other nations.

Colleagues, We as parliamentarians must ensure that this agreement is delivered in practice, supporting indigenous innovation as well as global application.