

**SPEECH AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE 149TH IPU ASSEMBLY  
BY THE DELEGATION LEADER, HON. ASISKUMAR GAJADIEN  
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**Mr. Chairman, esteemed colleagues,**

It is an honor to address you today on behalf of the National Assembly of Suriname. I stand here to emphasize the critical role that science, technology, and innovation (STI) play in shaping a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable future for our country.

Suriname is a diverse and vibrant nation—a mosaic of ethnicities, cultures, languages, and religions, blessed with a unique and fragile ecology. With over 93% of our land covered by forest, Suriname is one of the most forested nations on Earth. Our rich biodiversity is not just our pride but a global treasure that demands vigilant protection. As the world confronts escalating environmental challenges, it is clear that investment in scientific research—particularly in biodiversity, conservation, and climate resilience—is essential to safeguarding our forests and the future of our planet for generations to come. That is why the recent Final Investment Decision (FID) announcement of more than 10 billion USD for an offshore oil project in Suriname is particularly significant, as it has been designed to be environmentally carbon neutral.

However, to fully embrace the benefits of science and technology, we must address a key challenge: the digital divide

that persists in our rural and remote areas. Limited access to the internet threatens to leave many of our citizens behind in this digital age. But I assure you, we are committed to closing this gap.

The Surinamese government has placed universal access to Information Communication Technologies (ICT) at the forefront of its development agenda, through the ICT Vision 2030 initiative. This vision charts our course from a lower-income country to a thriving middle-income economy within the next decade. ICT, we believe, will be the engine of productivity, innovation, and global competitiveness for Suriname.

A significant aspect of this vision is digital financial inclusion. As we advance our ICT agenda, we are working to ensure that digital payment systems are widely accessible, particularly in underserved areas. The digitalization of payment systems is a crucial driver for financial inclusion, enabling even the most remote communities to participate in the formal economy. By introducing mobile banking solutions and online payment platforms, we are empowering citizens to access financial services without the need for physical banks. This innovation will facilitate economic activity, increase financial literacy, and provide new opportunities for entrepreneurship.

In our National Development Plan 2022-2026, we have outlined a clear pathway for utilizing ICT to build a knowledge-based economy. We are not pursuing digitization for its own sake, but because it will empower every

Surinamese citizen, spur inclusive development, and enhance social, political, and economic resilience.

Our progress is tangible. We have deployed Safe City Services in key urban areas of Paramaribo, advancing security and urban management. Our government ministries are benefiting from the rollout of Cloud Services through the e-Gov Cloud initiative. Additionally, significant efforts are underway to digitize essential services like education, civil documentation, payroll systems, A.I. and—most importantly—introducing e-payment systems for more transparent and efficient transactions.

In rural areas, approximately 60% of households now have access to broadband—a critical step toward inclusivity. But let me be clear: while we have made important strides, the journey is far from complete. Full digital inclusiveness remains our ultimate goal, and a key element of that inclusiveness is ensuring everyone can participate in the digital economy.

Suriname also recognizes the importance of international partnerships. We are actively collaborating with nations, particularly in the field of ICT, to expand our capacities and prepare for opportunities emerging from our oil and gas sector. Additionally, we are fostering regional cooperation through partnerships with Caribbean and Latin American nations. By pooling resources and sharing knowledge, we aim to strengthen our resilience in areas such as disaster risk management, digital infrastructure, A.I. and sustainable development.

As parliamentarians, we have a critical role to play in ensuring these initiatives are well-monitored and supported by legislation that encourages innovation, safeguards data privacy, and promotes inclusivity. In Suriname, our Parliament is committed to not only supporting but also overseeing the implementation of these transformative projects. Through the active engagement of our legislative bodies, we ensure accountability, transparency, and the alignment of STI advancements with the needs of our people.

Harnessing STI for sustainable development requires ongoing cooperation—both domestically and internationally. It also requires us, as policymakers, to adapt rapidly and ensure that no one is left behind in this fast-evolving digital world.

By closing the digital divide, embracing innovation, fostering regional cooperation, and championing financial inclusion, we can build a Suriname where every citizen has access to the opportunities of the future. Furthermore, with the global importance of our vast forests and biodiversity, we can be a key player in the international dialogue on climate action and sustainability.

Thank you.