

Main Debate, IPU General Assembly.

Remarks by Mr Pdraig O’Sullivan, Member of the Irish Parliament

Mr President, can I first acknowledge the great work of the IPU and our Spanish hosts this weekend. It is most appreciated and I would like to thank you for allowing me to represent my country here today.

Leston Bandeira, a professor of Politics at the University of Leeds once said that, ‘parliaments have come to personify all that is bad about politics’, and that ‘parliaments are destined to be unloved’. As a new, relatively young parliamentarian, I often feel that this is the case. But, it should not be.

Discourse, debate, public engagement should be the seed for any flowering democratic state. Yet, in my country, I feel much of the public have disengaged from our political system, particularly young people. And, I ask myself, why?

Why do the youth of my own country feel that government and our political institutions do not represent them? Because, if truth be told, we often don’t.

For too long our political leaders were oblivious to the main concerns of our young people, in areas pertaining to education, housing and, of course, the climate emergency. Young people around the world have led on these issues.

In own country, Ireland, these issues now have the potential to undermine people’s confidence in our political system. Despite being a wealthy, developed country, education is now affordable for many. Many young professionals cannot afford to purchase their own home and many remain unconvinced of our

ability or unwillingness to tackle the climate crisis head on. The government is my country, of which I am a member, is now trying to address these issues, but it takes time. But time often sows impatience and discontent. This discontent often manifests itself online, often fuelled by social media and fake news. The only way to challenge these falsehoods is to challenge fake news, stand up to bigotry and agents of discrimination, and to ensure that social media companies are held responsible for the content that they share on their platforms.

My country is renowned around the world for its education system.

Historically, we were called the 'land of saints and scholars'. We preserved knowledge in western Europe during the Dark Ages. Many of you who I have met this weekend have come to my country to further their education and I hope many others will continue to do so in the future. Education is one of the key weapons we have in our arsenal to combat disinformation and disengagement.

In Ireland, all students study civic and political education. This is to help inform them of their role in the world, how they can have their voice heard and how they, as citizens, have responsibilities in ensuring our democracy continues to be participatory and transparent.

Finally, can I echo the sentiments of the leader of my delegation earlier in regards to the United States. Ireland has always had a close relationship with the USA, our diaspora accounts for a significant percentage of their population.

Can I take this opportunity to reach out to all nations represented here, to use your influence and relationship to reach out to our friends in the USA, to invite

the, to return to the IPU. The theme of this Assembly has been about overcoming division and building communities. This was most clearly shown in our own Assembly on Saturday when five emergency motions became one through dialogue, communication and respectful agreement. What was achieved here this weekend can be achieved for the benefit of all.

Thank you.