

**Speech by Mrs. Helmen Kütt  
Member of the parliament of Estonia  
at the 139<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly General debate**

***Parliamentary leadership in promoting peace and development in the age of innovation  
and technological change***

**Geneva, Switzerland / October 2018**

Honourable President of the Assembly,  
Secretary General,  
Fellow members of the parliaments,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Innovation and technological change as drivers for development are as old as is the humankind. The same applies to the principles of peace and security. These narratives are interlinked and have the potential to push each other towards new qualities. Several innovations, which were first introduced for military purposes, are now in our daily usage. Let me mention, for example, the GPS, microwave, jet engine, super glue, canned food or the Internet. This proves that if we start with making better behavioural and technology choices, the future looks already brighter.

Therefore, at this General Debate, we should ask ourselves whether we use the innovation and technology to their fullest potential, and sometimes, while looking at the troubled waters of the global political, economic and social situation, we should even ask, whether we use them for the right causes.

*Dear colleagues,*

Science is a vital contributor to shaping sound policies, improving the welfare of people, building resilient capacities in developing economies. However, human well-being and economic growth should not be achieved at the expense of environment.

Especially the last element here – the environment – should drive our right action in coming years. It is not a behavioural choice, in many countries this is an existential matter. Here we need to address our youth and young people – which future we want them to inherit from us.

There have been many UN Security Council resolutions and discussions on young people and peace and security. However, it was just the UN Security Council Resolution 2250 in 2015, that addressed the related science and innovation issues and recognized that young people play a crucial role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. It also mentions that youth population presents a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place. In this regard, I loudly commend the new IPU cooperation initiative with CERN – the Science for Peace Schools – aimed at bridging the worlds of science and politics, and at helping create parliamentary networks for nations to address these common challenges together.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Youth needs education, including entrepreneurship skills. I am fully confident stating that there is no child whose imagination is not sparked by education, science and innovation: by advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, clean technologies, nano- and biotechnology or genome studies – all what we should hire to enhance the very fundamentals of our daily life.

In addition, stronger emphasis on gender, especially on women and girls, is needed. Far too many girls are forced into early marriages. Child labour is the only option for millions of children to survive, their true potential remaining not materialized. Right for development is a human right, and we should not hinder this. Only then, we can build resilient societies, where young people can use the fullest potential of their creativity.

We, the parliamentarians should play a critical role to encourage the youth to be active participants in developing inclusive societies. We need to support equal access for all young people to education, labour market, advance their human rights and fundamental freedoms, promote rule of law, gender equality and reach out proactively to the most vulnerable people.

The voice of youth needs to be heard and empowered in order to contribute to social transformation with enthusiasm, idealism, energy and innovative solutions. Estonia has had a positive outcome of lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 at local elections. It was a response to the initiative of young people who wished to be more involved in the decision making process at the local level.

As parliamentarians, we are to serve not the electorate, but all the people. I am glad to welcome the discussions held at the Forum of Young Parliamentarians during this Assembly – also they have addressed different aspects of the current discussion topic.

*Dear colleagues,*

Last, but not least, I would like to mention the digital solutions. People often tend to think that e-Governance is about technology, but to make real impact on the society, it is about inclusiveness, efficiency, transparency and accountability in all government processes, and as the most important, it is about trust and empowerment.

Digital development has brought Estonia more economic growth, more resource efficiency, more human development. As a small country, we fully understand, that you cannot only consume peace and security and development, but you always have to take the contributing view as well. Therefore, Estonia has chosen promotion of good governance via ICT solutions as one of the key priorities of our country's development cooperation activities world-wide.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Innovation and development is a choice, a mentality, not a compulsion. We need engagement and offer opportunities. To conclude, please allow me to use, and slightly amend the words of H.E. Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations: as the world strives to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – our universal blueprint for building peaceful, prosperous societies on a healthy planet – harnessing the great power of science, innovation and new technologies can be one of the keys to success, including by opening new pathways of development and helping countries gain access to the global store of knowledge.

*I thank you for your attention.*