

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS AT THE 27<sup>TH</sup> GET-TOGETHER OF SRI  
LANKAN QUANTITY SURVEYORS IN DUBAI**

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Your Excellency, Mr. Sarath Wijesighe the ambassador for Sri Lanka, Chairman of the Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors and other Members of the SLQS, fellow Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors and their family members, distinguished invitees, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure and honour to be invited to deliver the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual get-together keynote address of the Quantity Surveyors in the United Arab Emirates at Trader's Hotel to-night. Therefore, I would like to thank the chairman and office bearers of the SLQS and the organizing committee of this event for their kind invitation. This is my first visit to this country and the first experience with the major professional organization outside Sri Lanka.

The word get-together refers specifically to a social gathering, which usually plays the role of a representative body of such an organization in many of its social functions. To my understanding your organization is not confined to organizing social functions such as welfare and entertainment but has a wider agenda of building a resource pool of professionals who pursue their career goals through continuous academic advancement.

In this context, I would ask the question what does one expect or what are the objectives to be achieved after entering an organization

particularly working away from one's familiar surroundings, in a competitive field where having the edge over the others is so important and one is expected to rely on ones competencies and not affiliations, friendships or other links that are so important when working in Sri Lanka. It is my understanding that everyone aspires to acquire and develop his or her knowledge, competencies and skills of a particular profession or trade. The vision and the mission of your association requires a high degree of commitment, dedication and professionalism.

We are all product of the modern university education in Sri Lanka originated on the ox-bridge model at the latter part of British colonial rule. Over the years we have expanded the number of universities diverting from the original ox-bridge model and formulated our own parameters. Currently, there are 14 conventional universities, one Open University, three campuses, nine undergraduate and 7 post-graduate institutions under the purview of the University Grants Commission (UGC). At present, we are exploring all possible opportunities of developing higher education parallel to other countries in the world.

All Quantity Surveyor graduate are a product of the University of Moratuwa which is a nationally and internationally reputed university in the country. The university offers many employment-driven graduate programs which have a higher demand locally and internationally. The university introduced the QS programme in 1985/86 but produced a limited number of graduates. Although the number of the graduates was increased to about 100 per annum the demand is far greater. The biggest challenge facing our university education is to diversify programmes without undermining quality of

the courses offered education. In 2008, 2009 and 2010, well over 5,000 students has applied for the Quantity Survey programme but only 100 were selected at the University of Moratuwa. The university is preparing to admit another 50 students by 2013 provided that more infrastructure facilities are available. Another to move to a knowledge economy and to make a knowledge hub in South Asia more students have to be admitted to such programmes in our universities.

It is widely recognized that education particularly higher education is the backbone of a nation. Education enhances the quality of life in every society. It can play a crucially important role in middle income countries like Sri Lanka in assimilating a global knowledge economy. Today we are in agreement that education is essential for the development of the economy, building a democratic culture and equal access and equity in quality of education for all. It is perceived of as the way forward for furthering socio-economic and political development of a given society. Although, there were growing demands for non state university education the protracted political conflict precluded any serious and structured discourse on expanding none state interventions in higher education and consequently there were no opportunities to respond to the ever increasing demand for non state funded university education. Although, we do not have accurate figures on the enrolment and retention of our students at overseas universities and institutes of higher learning, we estimate that about 8000 to 10, 000 students leave the country annually for higher education. A similar number or an even higher number enroll at higher education institutions that have degree awarding status.

In this context, it is obvious that the public and private sector have to seek options to expand access and ensure equity both in an informal and formal setting. The involvement of the private sector in higher education in the form of cross border higher educational institutions is expanding. It was a result of the globalization, and internationalization of higher education and the expansion of the use of mass communication, Communication Technology in the sphere of University Education. There are well over 70 cross border institutes providing overseas higher education. Almost 50,000 are following certificate courses, diploma and degree programmes in such institutes.

In accordance with the ambition of the government to create a knowledge hub to spearhead a knowledge economy in the country, all options have been explored to set up branch campuses of international universities and the establishment of non state universities in the country. We fully understand that no country in the world is able to develop its higher education system in isolation and in seclusion, but we will continue to develop a regulatory environment for the expansion of private universities while making provision to protect and promote state funded university education based on the principles of the right to education namely equal access, equity in quality and transparency in effective, participative and representative governance.

The challenge before us is to modernize higher education while improving access and quality of university education to meet the demands of the new millennium. The answer lies in changing the traditional model of teaching and learning measured by where we study and what we learned. New pressures such as alignment to industry and the demands of the workforce, the move to mass

education, a geographically fluid workforce that cuts across national and regional boundaries, economic globalization and mass communication have exacerbated the need to move away from rote learning to competency based education. Therefore, we need to redefine our programs to provide competencies for a new generation of learners.

We should not forget the fact that the country is going through a period of transition from militarization and conflict to peace and sustainable development within the entire country. We are living in the most remarkable of times. Just consider, for a movement some of the changes have been taken place in the region of Asia and the country within the past few years. Asia is emerging as a powerful economic force with China, Japan and India now ranked as the largest economies in the world. The northern war has ended and terrorism has been rejected within Sri Lanka and the ballot has proved to be the most sustainable mode of change over the bullet and violence. The infrastructure for the five hubs such as naval, energy, aviation, commercial, and knowledge has being introduced.

Therefore change comes as an evolving process in tandem with national trends. There are many commitments and sacrifices that have to be made in the interest of national development and we have to face the realities of our operating environment where change if not well managed will become a source of conflict, confrontation and disruption.

Therefore, all stakeholders in higher education including Ministry of Higher Education, University Grants Commission, Universities and the

private sector have to work together to forge new paths and new structural mechanisms in expanding access and ensuring quality in higher education. Quality not only includes a learner centered teaching learning process, good academia, research that contributes to national development and good infrastructure but also alignment to the demands of the labour force and citizenship building.

All higher education institutions have the responsibility of forging links with industry and the private and public sectors, providing career guidance services and skills development and leadership building to prepare students for the world of work. Therefore awarding degrees does not suffice we have to transcend these boundaries and think of a holistic education. The state universities are challenged by all these factors and so are the private institutions. Therefore we have to look for collective solutions.

Moreover, I earnestly request all of you who are working away from your own country to consider your duties towards the country at a time when we are socially, politically and economically challenged to build a new society with a durable peace and sustainable development.

The Donor forums such as the Paris Declaration of 2005 on Aid Effectiveness recognizes that the state and the society of a given country is responsible for its own development agenda and young people in such a context is a vital human resource for development. Sri Lanka is yet to harness the strength of its youth population positively and the state recognizes the fact that the time has come to do so. So far we have witnessed the negative harnessing of youth power for political agendas as evidenced in state universities. However, we do not

want to see the other extreme in private universities where young people are alienated from their own society and culture. Therefore we have a collective responsibility of harnessing our strengths to build a better society.

Let me finish with a quotation from Niccolò Machiavelli who is one of my favorite political thinkers from the 16<sup>th</sup> century in Italy:

“There is no more delicate matter to take in hand, nor more dangerous to conduct, no more doubtful of success, than to step up as a leader in the introduction of change. For he who innovates will have for his enemies all those who are well off under the existing order of things, and only lukewarm support in those who might be better off under the new”.

I take this opportunity to wish all the Sri Lankan Quantity Surveyors and their family members a bright future.

Thank you.