

**Welcome Address by Former Ambassador T.P.Sreenivasan, Vice chairman
of KSHEC at the Global Education Meet, January 29, 2016.**

Prof. William G. Tierney of the University of Southern California,

Dr. Arbind Prasad, Director General, FICCI,

Shri. B.Srinivas, Principal Secretary, Higher Education, Government of Kerala,

**Shri.S.Ajikumaran, Special Officer GEM and former Special Secretary, Higher
Education, Government of Kerala,**

Vice Chancellors,

Distinguished Delegates,

I should apologize for the delay in convening the Inaugural Session of the Global Education Meet. As you have been informed, a section of students made an effort to block entry to the Convention Centre to protest against what they call “commercialization of higher education.” Although we had explained the goals of the Meet to them including through my op-eds in the ‘Times of India’ and ‘Mathrubhumi’, two leading dailies, they had declared that they would stop the Meet at “any cost”. I did not realize that the cost was an attack on me, but I am happy to survive it to be here to welcome you. I am sure that our friends from abroad will see it as “militant democracy” in operation.

The Hon. Chief Minister and the Hon. Education Minister have not been able to reach here and we are requesting Prof. William Tierney to inaugurate the Meet, representing the distinguished delegates from abroad. May I say a few words of welcome, particularly to set the stage of the Meet and to express our gratitude to all of you for being here this morning despite the difficulties you faced.

I have a sense of fulfilment as I welcome you to the Global Education Meet, Kerala 2016 as it comes at the culmination of a journey my colleagues in the Kerala State Higher Education Council and I began in October 2011. We set an agenda for ourselves to create a Higher Education 2.0 with special attention to infrastructure, teachers training, technology based learning, autonomy, research and internationalization. Although the progress on the ground has been modest, we are leaving behind a treasure of recommendations, painstakingly prepared with the participation of some of the best academics in the country. They contain a road map, a way forward, which, if implemented, will transform higher education in Kerala. I am grateful to the Government for entrusting this task to us and for accepting our advice wherever

feasible. I hope that we will have the mindset and the money one day to redefine higher education in Kerala.

Internationalization of higher education is not a new phenomenon in India. Education has been a window to the world for India for years. But today, it is an absolute necessity, because India cannot play its legitimate role in global affairs without a higher education system, which matches the best in the world. We should not only innovate constantly but also emulate the best practices in the world and not insist on reinventing the wheel. Fears of commercialization should not deter us from moving with the times. Over the centuries, we have welcomed and absorbed the best in many civilizations without being swept away by them. We should not be afraid to learn from others for fear of being overwhelmed by globalization. The message that has come from the World Economic Summit a few days ago was that we are at the beginning of the fourth industrial revolution in the world and we cannot be part of it unless we join the education revolution, which is already under way. At the Meet, we are following the sage advice given by the great nationalist, Swami Vivekananda. "Stand on your own feet, and assimilate what you can, learn from every nation, take what is of use to you," he said.

The Global Education Meet happens to be the swan song of the present KSHEC. Our success in organizing an International Meet on Transnational Education in January 2014 must be the reason why the Government decided to entrust us with the organization of GEM, together with the Department of Higher Education and FICCI. In my experience of international meets, this is the one that was organized in the shortest time. To organize an international meet in three months and that too at a time when the world was in a holiday mood was a tall order and many of the deficiencies of the GEM should be attributed to it. But I hope that you will overlook them and appreciate that the organizers did their best.

The idea of the GEM came from our Hon. Minister of Education after a visit to the Academic city in Dubai. His openness to change has resulted in the agenda of the Meet, which will consider, among the new ideas for international cooperation, the establishment of an Academic City and International Higher Academic Zones. Access by all students to these institutions will be ensured by a scholarship programme. Many experts told us that such initiatives would succeed only if private universities and foreign universities are allowed to participate fully in them. The Theme paper, prepared by a distinguished team of academics, outlines the options available to us within the existing regulations and I am sure that the Meet will help us fashion the way ahead in its Kovalam Declaration.

You will notice that we have dispensed with many rituals that go with such occasions. A long welcome speech, which recounts the well-known accomplishments of everyone

present is also being abandoned. All of you are here because of the mark you have made to the cause of higher education and our expectation that you will contribute substantially to our deliberations. I shall, therefore, welcome you all at once. I welcome, on behalf of the organisers, Prof. William Terney, who represents the distinguished foreign participants in the Meet, the distinguished Director General of FICCI, Shri Arbind Prasad, the energetic Special Officer of the GEM, Shri. Aji Kumaran, our international participants, our national participants, our guests, the media and all others involved in this Meet.

Thank you.