

Remarks by former Ambassador T.P.Sreenivasan, Executive Head of the Kerala State Higher Education Council at the UNC-India Summit II at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. June 25, 2014.

Member of the UNC Board of Governors, Hari Nath,

UNC President Tom Ross,

VP for International Engagement, UNC, Leslie Boney,

Scott Simkins of NCA and TSU,

International Programs Coordinator Bonnei Derr,

Members of the faculty,

Friends,

The campus air in Chapel Hill exhilarates me even though I have been on the road for more than 24 hours and I am not sure when the jet lag will hit me. It is indeed an honour to be invited as the Keynote Speaker at the UNC-India Education Summit II, 2014. I recall how the idea of Kerala-UNC collaboration at a seminar organized by the Wadhvani Chair of the CSIS a year ago, at which I made a presentation on the Kerala State Higher Education Council under the chairmanship of Ambassador Rick Inderfurth, himself an alumnus of the UNC at Chapel Hill.

Leslie Boney and Scott Simkins should be in the category of pioneers and explorers like David Livingstone and Christopher Columbus, as they came to the distant Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala State in their quest for new frontiers of educational cooperation. Today, we are reaping the harvest of their efforts by celebrating the growing cooperation between UNC and Kerala. I am here to reciprocate their visit and to see how far we can go on our path of collaboration. During the initial visit itself, they made a contribution to our thinking at the International Meet on Transnational Education (IMTE) as well as at the seminars in the Mahatma Gandhi University (MGU) in Kottayam and the Cochin University of Science and Technology (CUSAT) at Kochi. Two more experts, Sanjiv Sarin and Jerono Rotich have also been to MGU even within the first year of our cooperation. This Summit will give us an opportunity to assess the work of UNC not only in Kerala, but also in the rest of India. The pace at which UNC has begun to work in India is truly remarkable.

Leslie has asked me to place the educational reforms in Kerala and India in the context of the advent of the new Government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Neeraj Agrawal has

already spoken of the prospects of the Narendra Modi Government from the point of view of a BJP insider. I share his view that there is much excitement about the change in Government and there is an air of new purposefulness in India. Many policies of the new Government are yet to be announced, but the indications so far are that there would be change, but also continuity, particularly in foreign policy. As for education, the concerned Minister, Smriti Irani, who was initially criticized for not having been to a University, has made a mark as a young, energetic and visionary person. A new educational policy is said to be on the anvil and all indications are that it is likely to be forward looking, modern and technologically savvy. She has spoken of excellence in institutions in every state and the adoption of modern techniques of education like MOOCS.

The reports from Leslie and Scott have indicated the efforts we are making to build Higher Education 2.0, with six areas identified for special attention. The Central Government too seems to be introducing reforms, building on the good foundations laid in the past to meet the challenges and use the opportunities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, particularly the demographic dividend India will have in the next few years. In my view, what is needed is not just a new education policy, but a new education system.

The new Government has inherited a substantially diminished relationship between India and the United States, compared to its heyday at the time of the India-US nuclear deal. President Barack Obama came to India in 2010 with the intention of building a defining relationship of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expecting to benefit from the nuclear deal, purchase by India of military aircraft and the liberalization of the Indian economy. Those hopes have been belied for various reasons, most notably because of the policy paralysis in Delhi. The “roller coaster ride” of India-US relations had reached a deep trough, with the Khobragade incident and the visa denial to Narendra Modi imposed in 2005. But as it has been made clear by recent events, the roller coaster has begun to move up again. Since the priorities of the Modi Government are domestic development and strengthening India’s strategic space, the US will be a natural partner and the baggage of the past will be left aside. Prime Minister Modi is scheduled to visit the US this September and no visa hassle is expected!

It must be remembered that even in the midst of the din and bustle of political controversies, quiet work in the various working groups has been taking place and education is one of the areas in which progress has been made. I have no doubt that this will continue and new areas of cooperation between the two countries will emerge. I hope that the modest success we have achieved in Kerala-UNC cooperation will be a contribution to the larger picture.

The reports we have received today on the various ongoing programs like UNC’s Hindi-Urdu Language Consortium Program, its MOOC on the Asian economies, Social Work cooperation between UNC Wilmington and Bangalore University and others show how much UNC is involved in India already. There was a time when India was hardly on the American radar, political, economic or educational. But today, India is very much in the consciousness

of the US and the prospects are bright for multifaceted collaboration. From being “estranged democracies”, the two countries have become “engaged democracies”. The UNC-India Summit II has been a significant milestone in our journey together.

Thank you.