

**Speech of Hon'ble Smt. D. Purandeswari, Minister of State of Human Resource Development, Government of India on the occasion of the valedictory function of the Sub-Regional Preparatory Conference for South, South-West and Central Asia on Higher Education**

**26<sup>th</sup> February, 2009**

Hon'ble Minister, Mr. Thakur Singh Powdyel

Hon'ble Minister, Dr. Mohammed Mehdi Zahedi

Hon'ble Minister, Ms. Renu Kumari Yadav

Hon'ble Minister Prof. Wiswa Warnapala

Hon'ble Minister, Dr. Ahmed Ali Manik

Distinguished heads of delegations from participating countries belonging to South, South-West and Central Asia

Mr. R.P. Agrawal, Secretary, Department of Higher Education

Mr. Nicholas Burnett, Assistant Director General of UNESCO

Prof. Sukhdeo Thorat, Chairman, University Grants Commission

Distinguished participants and invitees to this Conference

After two days of fruitful discussions, we have come to the concluding session of this Conference. All good things have to come to an end and the same is true for our Conference. I must say that this Sub-Regional Conference has seen very active and intense participation from the delegates of all the countries and the mutual sharing of information and experiences has been really rewarding for all of us. In fact it now seems that the present two day Conference should have been for a longer period as it

would have provided us even more opportunities for interaction. However, we are also conscious of the very heavy demands on the precious time of the Hon'ble Ministers and delegates who have come from different countries. I am sure the dialogue which has started amongst us through this Conference will continue over time and lead to further regular interactions amongst academics and education administrators of the countries of this region.

2. I have been informed that sharing of information and experiences through presentation of Country Papers has indeed been very rewarding. The Country Papers have given us an opportunity to know the initiatives been taken in the Higher Education Sector by the different countries of our region and an opportunity to learn from each other.

3. As we all know, the countries of this region have had a long history of cultural and economic cooperation since ancient times leading to exchange of ideas and goodwill. Our region has many social, cultural and economic commonalities as also common problems and challenges like increasing access to higher education, ensuring quality with equity and developing value oriented society which has respect for universal peace and brotherhood. Time has come that we should give further impetus to the spirit of regional cooperation in the field of education so that all the countries of this region prosper by further development of the higher education sector.

4. As we all know, this Conference has been held at the behest of UNESCO as a preparatory meeting for the International Conference. However, I feel that the academicians and administrators of the countries of

this region should meet regularly to discuss and develop strategies for the development of the higher education sector in our region through mutual cooperation and collaboration. In fact we should think of meeting at least once every year, may be in different locations to discuss issues of mutual interest relating to faculty exchanges, student exchanges, joint research collaborations, mutual recognition of qualification, etc. Indeed these initiatives will be of immense value for furthering regional collaboration in the field of higher education.

5. I am really happy that the Conference is concluding with “Delhi Declaration, 2009” which indeed will be a guiding factor for further development of higher education in the region as also a valuable input for the consideration of the participants of the International Conference on Higher Education which will be held at Paris in later half of this year.