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Организация
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربيـة والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of STI Forum

Colombo (Sri Lanka), 16 August 2016

Honourable Mr Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Science, Technology and Research,

Ms. Dhammika Wijayasinghe, Secretary General, Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO,

Ms Wijialuchchumi, Secretary, Ministry of Science, Technology and Research,

Professor Sirimali Fernando, Chairperson of the *National Science Foundation*,

Professor Samantha Hettiarachchi,

Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO Tilak Ranaviraja

Members of the scientific community,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be at this important forum with you today.

I would not miss the opportunity that this first official visit to Sri Lanka gives me to learn about about your heritage, including in science and innovation. I saw the extraordinary architectural and scientific achievements of your ancestors in Polonnaruwa and Sigirya, with advanced hydraulic systems. In Kandy I visited the

University of Peradeniya, where I discussed with the Vice-Chancellor and faculty the links between science and policy. This brings us together today.

I know the committment of the Government of Sri Lanka to harnessing the power of science, technology and innovation for the benefit of all.

I recall well meeting the Honourable Mr Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Science, Technology and Research at UNESCO last November, when you presented Sri Lanka's development strategy – in particular, your dream of the *Exploratorium*, a national innovation platform with a museum centre for technology-driven development through cutting-edge science.

Let me underline UNESCO's readiness to support Sri Lanka every step of the way.

I am convinced science holds answers to key questions we must address today – questions about equitable and inclusive growth, about sustainable development, about the resilience of our societies about risk reduction, oceans, about peace and better livelihoods.

For over seventy years, UNESCO has worked to help countries and States answer these questions, creating platforms for cooperation.

The "S" in our acronym was a latecomer to our mandate – introduced during the Organization's constituent conference in London in November 1945.

Since then, science has taken a place at the heart of UNESCO's work to craft new forms of global cooperation for peace and development.

Our starting point is clear.

Science flourishes through dialogue, through the interaction of peoples and cultures, through the meeting of minds.

It prospers in a soil that is rich in diversity, in a climate that favours exchange.

As you have mentioned Honourable Minsiter on many occasions, this work has never been so important.

2015 saw the world shape two ground-breaking international agreements – the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Change Agreement*.

These embody a new vision for prosperity, peace and the planet, on the basis of human rights and dignity, for poverty eradication, for sustainability.

Science is essential to taking this vision forward.

But not just any science.

We need stronger science, more connected science.

We need science that is more deeply integrated into policy-making.

The complexity of challenges today calls for an ever greater expansion of human knowledge, for a new unity across the sciences, for stronger connections between scientific and traditional knowledge, for tighter linkages between science, policy and society.

I believe we need a new paradigm for science, technology and innovation, science for poverty alleviation and for the protection of the environment.

'Progress' has no meaning if it only benefits the few – if it doesn't eliminate poverty, reduce inequalities, protect the world we live in.

This is why science, technology and innovation stands at the heart of the new global agenda – because it is vital for the creation of knowledge, vital for the sustainability of oceans, for water management, for economic growth – in short vital for the sustainability of all development.

For this, we need to create the right ecosystem -- we need to bridge knowledge divides.

This means strengthening national capacities in science, technology and innovation.

Talent is everywhere – our utlimate renewable energy is human talent and human ingenuity.

Science capacity is vital for autonomous – and therefore – sustainable development.

These goals guide all of UNESCO's action – through our intergovernmental scientific programmes, through our science education initiatives, through our Centres of Excellence, institutes and UNESCO University Chairs, through our science policy initiatives, through the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, through support to South-South cooperation in different areas.

This spirit underpins the partnership Sri Lanka and UNESCO have crafted.

This starts with support to effective science teaching and learning in schools, through science kits, through master and teacher training, through education for sustainable development.

UNESCO is leading *COMPETENCE* across the region -- the *Programme to Enhance Technology, Engineering and Science Education in Asia*.

We are working to raise the profile of science for girls and boys, to make science careers more attractive, to broaden the base for innovation.

This is especially important for girls – this is not only a human rights issue -- this is about empowering every citizen to create and share knowledge, about giving girls the chance to pursue scientific careers.

UNESCO's Office in Bangkok is leading activities across the region to map girls and women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

With the United States, recently, UNESCO is supporting the *TeachHer Initiative*, to empower girls to pursue science, technology, engineering, arts and design and mathematics.

All this is essential to widen the base for sustainable innovation, for green jobs, for greener societies.

I commend and congratulate Sri Lanka for its position in the innovation index that UNESCO is working on with partners across the UN system.

Our partnership with Sri Lanka includes a focus on building capacity to protect biodiversity at every level.

Sri Lanka is a Member of *UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific*, participating in the project on *Promoting Awareness on Coastal Marine Environmental Change and its Impact*, to enhance monitoring of harmful algal blooms, marine toxins, as well as coral reef restoration.

I would like to thank Sri Lanka for its cooperation and leadership in setting up the tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean that we launched in 2012 with centres in Perth, Hyderabad and Jakarta. This stands as one of the most exciting moments of my mandate because it is an initiative that not only saves lives but promotes resilient societies and develops ocean science across the world.

UNESCO provides technical support to the Sri Lanka-based *Madanjeet Singh Centre for South Asia Water Management*, in the field of water security, environmental preservation and climate change. I would like to invite Sri Lankan scientists to participate more actively in the UNESCO Institute for Water Education that has a vast network – this is vital for agriculture and for the sustainble management of natural resources.

We have partnered with the *South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme*, including to strengthen implementation of the *Convention on Biological Diversity*.

As you know, Sri Lanka is a champion in the *South and Central Asia Man and the Biosphere Network*, to deepen the connections between science, society and the environment -- drawing on the country's four Biosphere Reserves, in Hurulu, Sinharaja, Kanneliya-Dediyagala-Nakiyadeniya, in Bundala.

UNESCO is supporting Sri Lanka in the basic sciences, strengthening networks and building capacity across the region, linking science with policy-making, to better tackle the consequences of climate change.

This has included cooperation between UNESCO category 2 Centres and national institutes – for instance, between the *International Centre on Space Technology for Natural and Cultural Heritage* of China and the *Arthur C. Clarke Institute of Modern*

Technology in Sri Lanka, to use space technologies to monitor UNESCO designated sites.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Science, technology and innovation is essential to take forward the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement.

This calls for integrating the sciences deeply into policy-making at every level – this is why this Science Dialogue is so important.

Allow me to thank the Honourable Minister and the Government of Sri Lanka once again for its leadership – I look forward to deepening our partnership ever more.

We must build on these foundations, there is no time to lose, to support the ability of every woman and man to create and share knowledge, to nurture every source of innovation and creativity, to craft a more inclusive, sustainable and just path to the future. This dialogue is exactly about this ambition that your Government has and that is so deeply shared by UNESCO.

Thank you.