

INAUGURAL SESSION
(30 MAY 2019)

TWELFTH MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE OF HEADS OF UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSIONS/EQUIVALENT BODIES
KATHMANDU, 30-31 MAY 2019

OPENING STATEMENT BY H. E. MR. AMJAD HUSSAIN B. SIAL, SECRETARY GENERAL OF SAARC

Chief Guest, Honourable Giriraj Mani Pokharel, Minister for Education, Science and Technology of Nepal,
Professor Bhim Prasad Subedi, Chairman of the University Grants Commission of Nepal,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great privilege for me to address the Inaugural Session of the Twelfth Meeting of the Committee of Heads of University Grants Commissions or Equivalent Bodies.

We are greatly honoured to have in our midst the Hon. Minister for Education, Science and Technology of Nepal as the Chief Guest. His presence at this Inaugural Session amply signifies the importance of this Meeting.

I wish to thank the University Grants Commission of Nepal for hosting this important Meeting. The excellent arrangements made for this Inaugural Session deserve our commendation.

I wish to extend warm welcome to the distinguished delegates to this Meeting and to Kathmandu, in particular, which also hosts the SAARC Headquarters.

With the depth of knowledge and vast experience that the distinguished Heads of Delegation bring, I am confident of a successful outcome of this Meeting in further enriching regional cooperation in the vital field of education.

Distinguished Delegates,

As you are aware, one of the objectives of SAARC, as enshrined in its Charter, is to provide all individuals the opportunity to live in dignity and to realize their full potentials. We can achieve this objective through the promotion of education.

In due recognition of this reality, as early as in 1988, at the Fourth SAARC Summit, our leaders decided to include education as one of the areas of regional cooperation. Since then, the priority attached to the promotion of education in the region is amply manifest in the Declarations of successive SAARC Summits.

At the last SAARC Summit, our leaders expressed their resolve to eliminating illiteracy from the region in line with the global goal of education for all and ensuring quality education in all institutions by reforming curricula, teaching methods and evaluation systems, adequately supported by physical, technical and other facilities. At the same Summit, our leaders also agreed to promote regional cooperation in the field of vocational education and training.

The directives of our leaders are being pursued by several inter-governmental mechanisms. They include, among others, the meetings of SAARC Education Ministers and Heads of University Grants Commissions or Equivalent Bodies. In this perspective, the convening of this Meeting bears enormous significance.

The SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme is a commendable effort of our Member States to facilitate exchange of scholars and researchers across the region. Moreover, the establishment of the South Asian University is considered as one of the most significant accomplishments of SAARC in imparting quality education.

Besides, the SAARC Agriculture Centre offers PhD Scholarships to the nationals of the Member States to carry out agricultural research. The SAARC Development Fund also provides funding to the South Asian students to pursue Regional Inter-Professional Master's Programme in Rehabilitation Science.

Distinguished Delegates,

In our bid to attain regional objectives in education, we have developed the SAARC Framework for Action (SFFA) on Education 2030. As you are aware, SAFA-2030 not only provides an overall strategy for educational development, but it also seeks to promote specific commitments of South Asian governments in achieving SDG4.

We have also agreed on an "Action Plan on the Implementation of the New Delhi Declaration on Education", which identifies thirteen areas for cooperation. Some of the key areas of cooperation include: technical cooperation and exchange of experts, generating knowledge base required to support policy formulation, documentation and sharing or dissemination of information and knowledge, and monitoring of progress of SDG4.

Distinguished Delegates,

This Meeting is to consider several issues having an important bearing on the promotion of education in the region. Mutual recognition of professional degrees; quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms; and Open and Distance Learning are some of them. We look forward to concrete and action-oriented decisions by this Meeting for carrying forward regional cooperation in these vital areas.

Availing myself of this opportunity, I wish to encourage the Member States to offer more and more scholarships under the SAARC Chairs, Fellowships and Scholarships Scheme, which is also on the agenda of this Committee. In the meanwhile, it is becoming increasingly necessary to offer scholarships on need-based requirements of the Member States. We look forward to the guidance of this Committee in making the Scheme more robust and attractive.

There is much that we can learn from our development partners, particularly UNESCO, in promoting higher education in the region. We, therefore, look forward to the Committee's guidance in further enriching SAARC-UNESCO collaboration.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to thank the Hon. Minister for finding time from his busy schedule to grace this Inaugural Session with his august presence. I also wish to once again thank the University Grants Commission of Nepal for hosting this Meeting.

I wish the distinguished delegates fruitful deliberations during this Meeting and an enjoyable stay in this beautiful city of Kathmandu.

Thank you.

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