

**Welcome Remarks by Ambassador(Rtd) T.P.Sreenivasan, Vice-Chairman and Executive head of the Kerala State Higher Education Council at the Southern Regional Conference of RUSA, Thiruvananthapuram. July 15, 2015**

Distinguished Representatives of the MHRD,

Delegations from the southern states,

Friends,

I am delighted to welcome you to Kerala and particularly to Kovalam, which brought the state to the global tourist map. The sea, sun and sand join together in harmony here to create a virtual wonderland, which will take your breath away. I would like to extend a special welcome to the MHRD representatives, who, like the mountain going to Mohammed, have come to review the working of RUSA and to remove our problems and concerns.

We appreciate the gesture of the MHRD in choosing Kerala not only as the venue of the regional conference, but also as the front-runner state under RUSA. We feel rewarded for our hard and systematic work even before the RUSA funds have begun to flow into our higher education institutions.

The KSHEC is one of the oldest Higher Education Councils, having been established in 2007. The Council has done extensive work in exploring ways and means to achieve excellence in higher education and made a number of innovative and game changing recommendations to the Government. We have focused on infrastructure, teacher's training, technology based learning, research, autonomy, skills development and internationalization. The package of reforms we have submitted, if implemented, will change the face of education in Kerala. Only a conventional mindset and dearth of money have held back reforms in Kerala.

The advent of RUSA held out great hopes for us in many ways. It declared that "there is a crying need for holistic planning in higher education" and that "this planning should be done by an autonomous body, which can raise and allocate funds from state as well as central government." It was also stated "the main agency through which RUSA will work in the states will be the State Higher Education Council (SHEC), an autonomous body that will function at an arms length from

the state governments.” Moreover, “The Council will be expected to perform planning, monitoring and evaluation, quality assurance and academic functions, as well as advisory and funding functions.” It also promised, “planning will include creating new academic institutions and expanding and upgrading the existing ones.”

In other words, we had expected that a new era of availability of adequate funds and a novel way of allocating and monitoring funds would be ushered in. We had also expected that new and innovative projects would be given priority. But as the examination of our projects began, we realized that the form and substance of RUSA began to dwindle. Our ambitious proposals like an Innovation University, Assessment and Accreditation Council, Faculty Training Academy, skills development programmes, Police University and Arabic University were not even considered, as they were too new and novel. Instead, we have ended up, at least in the current plan period with a total of Rs.110 crores limited to 5 universities and 15 colleges, essentially for infrastructure development. Of course, infrastructure is very important and we welcome the allocation, but we cannot conceal our disappointment that RUSA has not become a game-changing phenomenon as yet.

We, however, worked within the constraints of the system, but not as the central autonomous body at arms length of the Government, but as an implementing agency of the Government, very much within the arms of the Government. We hope that, in course of time, RUSA will blossom into a truly innovative mechanism as originally envisaged and work with the academia through the Council.

I am aware that this is not the occasion for us to go into the nitty gritty of the implementation of RUSA. We shall do so when the state programmes are reviewed. But I thought that it would be useful to flag some of the important issues at the beginning so that we can engage in a fruitful discussion today.

Once again, let me welcome you and wish you a pleasant stay in Kerala.

Thank you.