

**High Commissioner's Response at the  
Australia Awards South & West Asia Scholars Forum 2018  
17<sup>th</sup> October 2018 at the Old Parliament House, Canberra**

Mr Simon Merrifield, Honourable Excellencies, distinguished guests,

I would like to thank the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for according me this singular honour, not just to respond to Simon's inspiring speech but also to address such a distinguished array of Intellectuals. Let me also add the congratulations of my honourable colleagues and myself to each one of you on your respective awards.

It was in July 1951 that seven Commonwealth nations, Australia, Britain, Canada, Ceylon, as Sri Lanka was then known, India, New Zealand and Pakistan launched the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific. It was a regional initiative designed to help developing countries as a cooperative venture for economic and social advancement of the people of South and South East Asia.

Over the years the concept was expanded upon by Australia and gave rise to the Australian Awards, of which this year each of you are proud recipients.

These awards are not merely about learning and linkages. They also embrace leadership and empowerment. The selection process as we all know is competitive and what makes these awards unique is that the related fields are identified in consultation with each of our countries to ensure that local development priorities and policies are adequately addressed in the study programmes.

This ensures continuing interaction between the two countries well beyond the programme itself and strengthens bilateral relationships. Eventually all of this contributes to the prosperity of the South West Asian Countries and the well being of the region.

Post the Second World War and in particular the second half of the 20th century, many Asian Countries led by China, India Japan and South Korea have mastered sophisticated technologies and are producing goods and services for the developed economies. They have also accomplished some remarkable infrastructure development within their own countries.

Indeed with almost four billion of the world's population already in Asia, the potential not just for products and services but also futuristic ideas and innovation remains significant.

In that regard The Asian Development bank has had this to say.

"Asia is in the middle of a historic transformation.

If it follows its recent trajectory by 2050 its per capita income should rise six fold in purchasing power parity terms to reach Europe's levels today. It will make 3 billion additional Asians affluent by current standards and Asia will regain the dominant Economic position it held on the world stage 300 years ago. "

Thanks to the Australian Awards, each of you can become part of that challenge and contribute towards that exciting transition.

I am sure my honourable colleagues will join me in conveying our sincere appreciation to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for this very meaningful and continuing initiative that provides our Scholars access to a world class Australian education.

For the benefit of the Award winners I would now like to move briefly away from the revered Halls of Learning to share some time tested values.

In the mid-eighties to help Ethiopia emerge from a devastating famine, some of the finest voices in the world came together to sing to raise assistance. Each voice contributed a line and that of the blind musician Stevie Wonder was " Let's start giving, for the choice we are making is to save our own lives ". More than 3 decades later I would urge you to reflect on that line.

The ability to distinguish between "Right" and "Wrong" will remain a priority in your lives. To illustrate that let me share the views of an eminent Queens Counsel of the past in my Country who said "In the field of Justice and fair play Right is Right and Wrong is Wrong. The two can never meet. To compromise the two takes an elastic conscience. Such individuals should be shunned for they indeed are the bane of society."

Never forget that every life that comes into this world has its own potential. What separate us are the opportunities. In that respect I am sure all of us gathered here today realise how fortunate we are which brings me to my next point; "Emulate the strong by all means but never forget to protect the weak."

Each of you will move on to higher achievements in your chosen field some even excelling to become heads of Institutions, Businesses, Governance etc. Remind yourself that Every Right implies a corresponding Responsibility and that greater the Authority, greater then must be the Accountability.

Finally I would like to share a cricketing story.

For those of you who follow that time consuming game called Cricket, the name Sir Donald Bradman will be familiar. An Icon of Australian cricket he averaged a phenomenal 99 in his Test career. When he was asked in retirement what he would like to be remembered most for, he unhesitatingly responded "My Integrity". So do not forget the priceless value of it.

Your Scholarship has given you a strong foundation. Strengthen it further by adding "Common Sense and Conscience" in all that you do. You will never go wrong.

May God Bless you All,  
Thank You

His Excellency Somasundaram Skandakumar  
Sri Lanka High Commissioner.