

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

*National Science Foundation, Sri Lanka*

### ***Prof. Sirimali Fernando***

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South Asia being home to well over one fifth of the world's population and covering 3.3% of world's land area, is both the most populous and the most densely populated geographical region in the world. According to a World Bank report published in 2015, based on data from the last quarter of 2014, South Asia appears to be the fastest-growing region in the world at present.

However, it still possesses the largest number of people who need to overcome extreme poverty. The data for year 2014 of the Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific carried out by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP) shows a worsening of the rich and poor gap in many of its countries. widening disparities and inequalities are a serious concern for the countries in the region and should be addressed urgently.

It is in this backdrop that this 2-day International Conference on Promoting Socio-Economic Equity in South Asia: challenges and prospects, is organized by the National Science Foundation (NSF), Sri Lanka jointly with Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). This Conference which will be held on 15-16 July 2015 in Colombo, marks the first programme conducted under the auspices of a joint agreement signed between the NSF and the ICSSR.

In addition to addressing economic aspects of inequality, the impact of neoliberal policies on poverty trends, social polarization, Interactions and intersections between caste, class and gender inequalities in South Asia, impact of egalitarianism, democratic politics and current social policies on changing patterns of social inequality, I am happy that a special theme on implications of Science and Technology on socio-economic inequality has been included. I hope the vital role of science, technology and innovation in promoting socio-economic equity and the need for the hard and soft sciences to work together would be a highlight of this Conference.

I have no doubt that the forty eight papers that will be presented and the Policy Dialogue on 'Challenges and Prospects for Reducing Socio-Economic Inequity in South Asia' scheduled to take place with the participation of wider group of stakeholders will enrich the deliberations and proceedings of the conference.

On behalf of NSF, Sri Lanka, I warmly welcome all international and local resource persons and participants to the Conference and appreciate the contribution made through sharing information, knowledge and experience. I deeply appreciate the sponsorship provided by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP).

I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Hettige, Chairman and the members of the Working Committee on Social Sciences of the NSF for their advice, support and guidance in organizing the Conference. I extend my appreciation to the Actg. Director General, and the staff of the Science and Technology Policy Research Division of the NSF for their dedication and hard work in organizing this Conference.

I wish it all success!