Closing Remarks

6th Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning

Kochi, Kerala, India
28 November 2010

By The Hon. Burchell Whiteman, O.J.
Chair of COL's Board of Governors

We have been sharing generously, with passion and also with respect. We have informed and been informed. We have raised questions and found some answers which in some cases have led to more questions. But that is the nature of the conversations around learning and around development. When you marry the two, you raise the level of the dialogue and the level of debate.

At the end of the day, however, we can say that many of us came as strangers and we are parting as friends. We have in fact expanded the circle of those who believe in the mission of COL, the power of ODL and the principles on which the Commonwealth was founded 62 years ago.

I believe it was Professor Anwar Ali who said that in the Commonwealth we understand the value of sharing without profit. Small surpluses perhaps but not profit. And colleagues, that is what seems to me to be at the heart of what we have been about in a Forum such as this. In considering the different development themes, the modalities for achieving desired outcomes, we have been using every opportunity to add value to what we do, to learn from each other, to innovate and to be encouraged.

But I am satisfied that we have not lost sight of the ultimate purpose of our engagement which is to create and strengthen the pillars of opportunity, equity, social justice and respect for all on which our democracies will survive and prosper. We have reminded ourselves that it is among the humblest of individuals and the most unlikely communities that we often find the solutions to major challenges, as Ms. Chetna Sinha pointed out yesterday.

If I may quote from a Jamaican thinker and social activist of the early 20th century, and one well known on the African continent and throughout the Americas, Marcus Mosiah Garvey,

“God and Nature first made us what we are and then out of our own created genius we make ourselves what we want to be. Follow that great law. Let the sky and God be our limit and Eternity our measurement.”

Our purpose is ultimately to support the creative genius which resides in each of our people and whose lives are affected by our work.
At the risk of being invidious, I have to say that Dr. Tharoor yesterday in his brilliantly erudite exposition and Sir John Daniel in his classic summary this morning both reflect the power of the intellect and the preparedness to challenge conventional wisdom and conservative orthodoxy. But from my listening in on a number of the sessions, these gentlemen simply represented on a central platform what many of you in the course of the last four days have been doing through the papers presented and the discussions in which you have engaged. If we can translate but a fraction of the intellectual energy and the passion which have been present here into continued action in Nairobi, Delhi, Wellington, Vancouver, Port of Spain or Port Moresby, then our sojourn in this most welcoming city and this state which is a centre of educational opportunity would certainly have been more than worth it.

I join in thanking the IGNOU team which took on a gargantuan task and accomplished it with deceptively apparent ease and I also thank the hardworking team from COL, Vancouver and CEMCA for ensuring that the central purposes of the Forum were prepared for and met. And may I thank the people of Kerala in particular for making us all so very welcome.

COL Vice President Asha Kanwar is brilliant at finding appropriate quotes from English Literature to suit the occasion, and I will not attempt to match her, but as I reflected on the enthusiasm which pervaded the conference, lines from William Wordsworth inspired by the French Revolution flashed across my mind.

“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive
But to be young was very heaven”

The second line will clearly not apply to all of us, but we can all display the energy of youth as we promote and implement the strategy of ODL to enhance the range and quality of Learning for Development.

Thank you all for making PCF6 another success and I trust that many of us will be looking forward to PCF7 in 2012.