

## **Profile of Professor M.J.S. Wijeyaratne**



**Professor M.J.S. Wijeyaratne** is the Senior Professor and Chair of Zoology in the Department of Zoology and Environmental Management and Chairman of the Research Council of the University of Kelaniya. He is also the Chairman of the National Science and Technology Commission of Sri Lanka.

He had his secondary education at Royal College, Colombo and obtained his BSc Honours from the University of Kelaniya, MSc from the University of Michigan, USA and PhD from the University of Kelaniya.

He had been the Dean of the Faculty of Science and the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Kelaniya. He had also been the Chairman of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD) of Sri Lanka.

He had served as a member of the Boards Governors of many National Institutions in Sri Lanka. These include the National Aquatic Resources Research and Development Agency, National Institute of Fisheries and Nautical Engineering, Arthur C Clarke Institute of Modern Technology, National Science Foundation of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Standards Institution and Industrial Technology Institute. Currently he is

a member of the Governing Board of the National Institute of Fundamental Studies, Council member of the National Academy of Sciences, Sri Lanka, Chairman of the Research Advisory Board of the National Science Foundation and the Chairman of the Board of Study of the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing.

He had also been the Chairman of the Oceanography and Marine Sciences Committee of the National Science Foundation and member of its several committees including Working Committee on Biological Sciences. Currently, he is a member of its Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics Education Committee and the Policy Research Committee of the National Science Foundation.

He is the Founder President of Sri Lanka Association for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources and the Founder President of the Alumni Association of the Faculty of Science of the University of Kelaniya. He had also been the General President of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science and the Institute of Biology of Sri Lanka. Further, he has also served as the General Secretary of the National Academy of Science, Sri Lanka. .

He is a Fellow of the Institute of Biology and the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka.

He has been involved in quality assurance activities of the higher education system of Sri Lanka since 2002. As the Deputy Director of the World Bank funded HETC project, he

was a key figure in developing the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework.

He has carried out a large amount of research on Fish Biology, Fisheries Management, Aquatic Biology and Aquatic Resources Management. He has published 93 research papers in peer reviewed indexed journals and 12 text books. He has made 89 presentations in national and international conferences including 06 Keynote addresses.

He is a Fulbright scholar and the recipient of the Fellowship on Conservation and Sustainable Development awarded by the University of Michigan, USA. In 1990, he was awarded the Third World Academy of Sciences Prize for **the best young scientist in Biology in Sri Lanka**. In 2010 he was awarded the prestigious **Lifetime Award for the Most Outstanding Senior Researcher in Biology** by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors of Sri Lanka. He has also won **Presidential Awards for Research** publications in several years.

## **Convocation Address**

### **Prosperity Challenge is in your hands**

Honorable Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Members of the Council, Deans of Faculties, Members of the Senate, Members of the Academic staff, Librarian, Registrar and the members of the Administrative staff, members of the Non-academic staff, Dear graduates, Parents, Distinguished invitees, Ladies and Gentlemen.

First of all let me thank the Vice-Chancellor, members of the Council and members of the Senate for inviting me to this august event of your University. I consider it a great honor and privilege to deliver this Convocation Address at the 11th Convocation of your esteemed university.

At this moment I recollect my association with your university several years ago. In 2009, I was the Chairman of the quality assurance review team that conducted the institutional review of your university. This review was done in order to ensure that the quality of your academic programmes are of accepted standards. Our review team noted that your university has many good practices which are not second to those of any other university in Sri Lanka.

During the past two decades your university has produced large number of graduates who are doing well in many spheres including education, culture, religion, science and technology both in Sri Lanka and abroad.

I congratulate all of you who have graduated today. I join happily with your parents, teachers, relatives and well-wishers in applauding you on your great success. A university degree is meant to be the icing on the cake on your path to success. With this degree, you would be able to achieve many things in your life ahead.

Today you are stepping out into the world as leaders with a degree from a recognized state university of the country. Do not forget that you have entered a state university of Sri Lanka several years ago securing very high marks at one of the most competitive examinations in the world, the GCE (Advanced) Level examination. In your age cohort, you are among the most intelligent. Today, there are large number of private higher education institutions in our country which offer degrees. Due to high competition to get into a state university, such private higher education institutes thrive in our country. Do not forget that all those who enroll in such private higher education institutions, except for a few, are those who could not get into a state university. Therefore, you should be very proud that you were able to enter a state university and graduate today.

As you all are aware, Sri Lanka is aiming at a booming economy through development. At the same time, this development has to be sustainable. Although the concept of sustainable development was put forward 30 years ago, that is in 1987, the need for it is felt by everybody only today. This is mainly because today we are facing the adverse impacts of

unsustainable activities carried out by human beings in the sake of development.

About 1½ years ago, on 25th September 2015, United Nations adopted its sustainable development agenda with 17 goals to be achieved by 2030 and ensure a sustainable future. These 17 sustainable development goals include ending poverty, ending hunger, ensuring good health and wellbeing, ensuring equitable and quality education, gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, decent work and economic growth, resilient industries innovation and infrastructure, reducing income inequality, sustainable cities and human settlements, ensuring sustainable consumption, combating climate change, sustainable use of ocean resources, sustainable use of terrestrial environments and halting biodiversity loss, promoting peace and strengthening global partnerships. Some of these such as equitable education for all has been almost achieved by us. About 99% our children enrol for primary education and 95% complete it. But why can't we make it 100%? When gender equity is considered, in my view, we have not discriminate the females from our ancient days. We as a nation respect females more than the western world. We were the people who produced the first woman Prime Minister of the world. Today, not like in some other countries, in Sri Lanka, equal number of girls and boys enrol for primary education. In the higher education sector, now the gender is imbalanced towards females. In our academic staff in the universities also, the gender is getting imbalanced towards females. However, among top ranks such as Vice-Chancellors, Chairpersons of State institutions as well as in the Parliament

gender is imbalanced towards males. I think this will also change in near future. Regarding health, all of our people have access to free health services. However, clean water is an issue faced by most of us. That is why we are paying more than LKR 50 per one Litre of water which is more than what a dairy farmer gets for a Litre of milk. Water is polluted due to our own activities. We all must get together and control polluting water. You as youth can take a leading role in this.

When talk about poverty, only about 6.5% of our population is living below the national poverty line. This is very much below the percentages in many other south Asian countries. But we can reduce this further. For that, our educated youth have a big role to play. Their contribution is needed to improve the economy which will contribute to eradicate poverty from our country.

Today, we are experiencing the severe repercussions resulting in due to climate change. We have prolonged droughts and sometimes unexpected heavy rainfall leading to severe floods. The climate has changed and is continuing to change further.

The main reason for this has been now identified as global warming. Global warming occurs mainly due to emission of greenhouse gasses to the atmosphere. These gasses prevent the escape of infrared radiation which comes from the sun to the earth surface back to the space resulting in warming of the atmosphere as inside a greenhouse. The main greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide. It is mainly emitted due to burning of fossil

fuel. In addition to climate change, global warming will contribute to melting of polar ice caps, which results in sea level will rise. It is estimated that sea level in Sri Lanka will rise by 20-60 cm by 2100. With this, about 25000 ha of our coastal areas will be inundated. Further climate change will change our monsoons affecting our agriculture. There can be intense flooding destroying our property, human lives and agricultural fields. This may reduce food supply also. So what we can do? We have to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. For that we can do a lot including using fuel efficient cars, saving electricity, using solar energy, using public mass transport etc. We have to consider the carbon foot print of the products that we purchase.

To ensure our sustainable economic and social development, we must have policy makers who understand these problems. So I urge you young graduates that at least some of you should become politicians and lead the country, not as most of our present day politicians who want power but genuinely love the country. We need educated politicians who can understand the problems and honestly take decisions for the benefit of the country considering the future generations of all citizens and not their own generations.

Your university education is a resource that you have gained over the past several years spending your precious youth time. Now you have to use that resource for a successful career which can significantly contribute towards sustainable



economic development of our country and sustainable social development of our nation.

Today most of our graduating youth want to be a graduate teacher of a government school or spend their time in a government office. Most of the youth who have been recruited to government offices as development assistants under the graduate employment scheme in the recent past, are idling in their work places and their knowledge and skills are not optimally utilized. The normal work at these offices can be done even without them. Even though the salary is low, most of the young graduates prefer to get a government job because of the job security, less work and the pension. There were occasion when the government offered employment under graduate schemes, the graduates who were holding high salary posts in the private sector went to those government jobs for a salary less than half of what they were getting. This attitude has to be changed. Today the engine of growth of economy of the country is the private sector. Of our entire work force, only 15% is employed in the state sector and 41% in the private sector while 32 % is self-employed.

Our economy today mainly depends on services followed by manufacturing. Contribution to GDP from these two sectors is 58% and 32% respectively. Agriculture, today contributes only for 10% of GDP. In the year 2000, agriculture contributed to 20% of the GDP. Therefore, agriculture sector is shrinking and majority of the jobs would be in the service and manufacturing

sectors. Most of these are in the private sector. Large amount of human work force is needed in these two sectors.

Today we are living in the rapidly changing era of 4th industrial revolution, which is based on knowledge based economy. The skills and competencies required for this modern era of knowledge based economy are highly complex than in the past. However, I am confident that you, as the most intelligent group of your age cohort can easily develop the required skills and competencies if you have not developed them yet.

You must have courage to face the requirements expected from you. In your path to success, sometimes you may come across disappointments and failures. But you should be courageous not to give up. Never think that you are a failure. You may fail but you have the potential for success. I think you have heard about Thomas Alva Edison who invented the electric bulb. He succeeded only at his 10000th attempt. He considered the failure as another stepping stone. When asked about his 9999 failures, his answer was “I have not failed. I've just found 9999 ways that it won't work”. So learn that lesson from the great inventor. Don't give up until you succeed. I can give you many more examples. Albert Einstein did not speak until the age of our and did not read until the age of seven and was expelled from school. His application to the Zurich Polytechnic School was also refused. Isaac Newton was not a bright student at school. Steven Spielberg Director of large number of famous films including Jaws, Jurassic Park, Close encounters etc., was

rejected from the University of Southern California School of Theatre, Film and Television three times. The lesson you can learn from all these great people is don't get disappointed with failure. You can succeed.

In your life ahead, another life skill that should be developed is the ability to identify immediate needs. Some things may be needed immediately. Others may be needed later. Those may not be essential at present. Everybody should be able to identify what is needed immediately and should work hard to achieve it. One of the issues that most of our people have is that they do not know what is essential and what their immediate needs are. Most of the people spend on unwanted things which they can live even without. First, immediate needs should be identified. You should be able to prioritize your needs. This, I am sure you can do as you have got a university degree from a recognized state university and you are highly intelligent.

In life it is also necessary to have a target. It is necessary to work towards it and achieve it. It is very easy to achieve the target if you are more practical. You must be able to analyse what is happening around you. With your experience and association with people, I am sure that you have now developed good analytical skills.

Further in all your work, in all the action you take, you must be transparent. Otherwise you will not be acceptable to the society. You have to be open as well as fair by everybody. In

your life you may have come across many people who are not open. They say something and do some other thing, sometimes just the opposite of what they have said. However, they are not acceptable to their peers, to their relatives and also to the society at large; but a person who is open and fair is acceptable to everybody.

These are some of the life skills that you need in your work place. These are the skills that help you to achieve your goals.

Do not worry about what other people say about you. Always take correct decisions and do the correct thing. With your knowledge, commitment and skills, I am sure that Sri Lanka can be a great country.

Finally I wish to quote His Excellency Former resident of India Late Abdul Kalam. At the end of his Convocation Address at the 14th Convocation of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati on 25th May 2012, he took an oath from the graduating students. This is valid for you too. The oath is as follows.

I quote. “I will work, work and work and succeed.

Wherever I am, a thought will always come to my mind; that is how I can contribute to develop my country.

I will always remember that let my winged days be not spent in vain.

I firmly believe that no problem can defeat me. I will become the captain of the problem, defeat the problem and succeed.

I will work and work for removing the problems faced by planet earth in the areas of water, energy, habitats, waste management and environment through the application of my knowledge.

My national flag flies in my heart and I will bring glory to my nation.” Unquote.

I wish you very best in all your future endeavors.

Thank you.

**Prof. M.J.S. Wijeyaratne**

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