



The Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats (CALD), hosted by the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka (LPSP), and with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), organized the conference "Choice and Excellence in Education" in Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The three-day conference brought together about 30 international participants and dozens of local participants from the host country.

In organizing the conference, CALD aimed to provide a venue for discussion of the current obstacles to the promotion of choice and excellence in education, as well as the possible solutions to them, with emphasis on the prescriptions that can be derived from the liberal ideology on the role of the private sector in guaranteeing choices and in providing quality education. On a more practical side, CALD wanted to assist the participants in identifying possible and specific policy recommendations, including but not limited to party platforms and legislative agenda, to improve the state of education in their respective countries.



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### CONCEPT PAPER

In the early 1990s, management guru and social thinker Peter Drucker correctly observed that the world was in the midst of a great transformation – the shift from a capitalist order to a “post-capitalist society.” In this new terrain, knowledge assumes greater prominence and becomes the primary means of production, displacing both capital and labor. While these traditional factors of production are still being employed to this day, the production, distribution and application of knowledge are now considered as the most important and productive economic activities. Post-capitalist society’s preoccupation with knowledge, without a doubt, brings renewed interest on the issue of education.

The importance of education has been repeatedly emphasized in a number of occasions of global significance. More than 60 years ago, the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights committed governments to recognize education, particularly primary education, as a basic human right. In 1990, at the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), more than 150 governments pledged to act on this commitment to universalize primary education. A decade after, national assessments showed that many states failed miserably in this regard. For this reason, countries found it necessary to reaffirm their pledge in the 2000 World Education Forum, which also secured a promise from rich nations to help the less developed ones in achieving EFA. On the same year, the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (UN MDGs) included two objectives related to education: (1) to ensure that all boys and girls complete primary schooling by 2015; and (2) to eliminate gender disparities in primary education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015.

Recent data on education, however, points to the fact that much more needs to be done to realize these goals. For one, there are currently 72 million out-of-school children and at least 771 million illiterate adults worldwide. The UN’s goal of getting as many girls as boys into primary and secondary school by 2005 was missed in over 90 countries. Gender disparities still prevail as a significant majority of the world’s out-of-school youth and illiterate adults are women. Addressing these persisting problems demands immense investment of monetary and human resources. An extra \$7-17 billion per year and 15 million new teachers, for example, are needed in order to provide universal primary education by 2015. With the onslaught of the global financial crisis, allocation of budget to meet these demands became more difficult for many countries.

Compared to other developing regions, Asia has a relatively better track record when it comes to educating its citizens. Countries in East and Southeast Asia, for example, have been praised for putting a premium on education and developing their human capital. In this sub-region, heavy investments in education, coupled with market-friendly economic policies, created the conditions necessary for rapid economic growth in the 1980s up to the mid-1990s. While the 1997 Asian financial crisis tempered this economic dynamism, education remains to be a priority area in the sub-region’s public policy. In South Asia, on the other hand, the World Bank has recently commended the sub-region for cutting the number of out-of-school children in half in a span of three years, from 2002 to 2005 – an impressive achievement for



such a short period of time. Furthermore, South Asia also registered substantial increases in both high school and tertiary enrolments, although the overall numbers are still low compared to other parts of the world.

Investments in education have both individual and societal benefits, and the experiences of countries in Asia attest to this. At the individual level, education endows the person with the necessary capabilities to choose the life that he wants to live. This, in turn, assists the individual in realizing his full potential, making him an efficient and productive member of the society where he belongs. At the societal level, education is assumed to be connected with economic development, democratization, decline in population growth rate, improvement of women's and children's health, and the control of spread of diseases. As hinted above, education was one of the critical ingredients that made possible the East Asian miracle. The larger budget allocated by the countries in the sub-region on education suggests that there is indeed a link between policy emphasis on education and the level of economic development. More importantly, an educated population constitutes a powerful social force that clamor for greater political space and more accountable government, laying the groundwork for the institution and consolidation of democracy. Apart from these, access to education, particularly of women, is also connected with the decline of fertility rate and improvement of women's and children's health, as literacy empowers women to make decisions which impact on their lives or that of their children. In addition, some studies also proved that lack of basic education is linked with the spread of HIV/AIDS as the rate of infection doubles among the young people who do not finish primary school.

Recognition of these benefits made Asian states more committed to the policy of ensuring that education is of acceptable quality and adequate quantity in the region. While there are still obstacles in universalizing basic education, and great disparities still characterize Asian countries in terms of their investments and performance in education, it cannot be denied that the issues pertaining to the role of the state in provision of education, and on who should have access to education, have been largely settled. The issue of greater salience at present is how to advance choice and excellence in education.

Promoting choice in education usually revolves on the role of the private sector in the provision of education. While the state should guarantee education for all, the presence of the private sector is believed to foster diversity and innovation in education. Some state-run schools, for one, had been criticized for turning into bureaucratic agencies that were inflexible and unresponsive to society's needs. It is for this reason that there is an increasing tendency today to reduce the role of the state in education - by granting greater operational autonomy to public schools; by promoting greater competition among schools; and by providing greater financial support to private schools to encourage their competitiveness. Hence, the proliferation of private educational institutions has now become a trend in many parts of the world, even in developing countries.

Choice, which goes with the increasing number of private schools, is undeniably related with the issue of excellence. The link is not as clear-cut however. On the one hand, it is said that the presence of private schools sets into motion the



market mechanism, which in the end, fosters educational excellence and innovation. On the other hand, some people argue that greater private sector involvement leads to a decline in the quality of education as a result of over emphasis on profit and disregard for education's social role. In many developing countries, for example, private schools, particularly at the higher education level, have sprouted like mushrooms to cater to the demands of the global market. A significant number of these schools, however, are mere diploma mills without a sense of social responsibility.

The liberal ideology is the common thread that binds choice and excellence in education. The liberal temper, without a doubt, requires the presence of different choices and alternatives, as this is a requisite for the exercise of freedom. Liberalism, however, does not end there. It also involves the development of individual's capacity to make intelligent and informed choices, without which, liberty loses its essence. As former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said in his opening speech in the 2009 Liberal International Congress, "liberalism equips a citizen to know that in the mixture of beauty and ugliness, virtues and baseness in which a person finds him or herself in this world, he or she must want to be on the side of the beautiful and the virtuous."

Many countries in Asia are now witnessing this complex interplay between or among choice, excellence, and liberalism in education. It is in this light that the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, hosted by the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka, and with the support of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), will be organizing the conference "Choice and Excellence in Education" in Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1-3 March 2010. The objectives of the conference are as follows:

- To discuss the current obstacles to choice and excellence in education and the possible solutions to them, particularly the expansion of private sector's role in education at all levels;
- To understand the linkage between education and the achievement and institutionalization of freedom, development and democracy;
- To share best practices and innovations in education in Asia and beyond, and in particular to uphold accountability as well as social responsibility while promoting variety of supply and opportunities for choice;
- To appreciate the role and importance of liberalism in promoting choice and excellence in education, whilst adhering to the key liberal principles of ensuring not just a safety net through state resources, but also a safety net that promotes excellence; and
- To identify possible and specific policy recommendations, including but not limited to party platforms and legislative agenda, to improve the state of education in the participants' home countries.

The following are the guide questions in each of the five conference sessions. Please note that this list is not exhaustive but is only meant to facilitate conceptualization and discussion. Presenters may tackle other related issues and questions apart from those listed. If this is the case, please inform the organizers of the revisions to be made.





### ***I. Current Obstacles to Choice and Excellence in Education: Global, South Asian and East and Southeast Asian Perspectives***

What are the general and most important obstacles to promoting choice and excellence in education in the world today? How different or similar are these from the obstacles being confronted by the sub-regions of East/Southeast Asia and South Asia? Are there possible ways to address those obstacles? What specific policy recommendations can be proposed to encourage choice and excellence in education at both global and regional levels? How can Asia promote excellence and adherence to best possible international practices, whilst also ensuring awareness of and attention to current social and economic issues in the region?

### ***II. Education for Freedom, Development and Democracy***

What are the links between or among education, freedom, development and democracy? What are the societal and economic benefits that can be derived from an educated population? Is it possible to have freedom and/or democracy without education and vice-versa? What are the roles that education plays in promoting economic development and democratic transition and consolidation?

### ***III. Case Studies from South Asia***

In the case study you are presenting, what have been the obstacles (regional, national and case specific) to choice and excellence in education? How did you overcome these obstacles? What methods, innovations and best practices may be replicated and/or adopted by other organizations and institutions in South Asia in order to promote choice and excellence in education?

### ***IV. Case Studies from East and Southeast Asia***

In the case study you are presenting, what have been the obstacles (regional, national and case specific) to choice and excellence in education? How did you overcome these obstacles? What methods, innovations and best practices may be replicated and/or adopted by other organizations and institutions in East and Southeast Asia in order to promote choice and excellence in education?

### ***V. Liberalism and the Promotion of Choice and Excellence in Education***

Is there a liberal agenda in education? What historical factors affected the agenda, and how did it change in response to changes in society? What are the political priorities of liberals in the field of education? How important is liberalism in the promotion of choice and excellence in education? What are the impediments to the practice of liberalism in education? Are there also problems that arise from the observance of liberalism in education? How can these problems be addressed? What are specific and concrete proposals, party platforms and legislative agenda that may enhance choice and excellence in education?



## **Conference Program**

### **March 1, 2010 – Monday**

Variable	Arrival
Variable	Check in at Cinnamon Lakeside Colombo Hotel
0930 H	Executive Committee Meeting (invitational)
1300 H	Luncheon with Turn-Over Ceremonies of the CALD Chairmanship from Singapore Democratic Party to the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka
1430 H	End of Luncheon
1500 H	Registration <i>Afternoon snacks will be served during the registration</i>
1530 H	Opening of Conference  <b>Session Chair: Hon. Sam Rainsy, MP</b> Leader of the Cambodian Opposition (Sam Rainsy Party) & Former CALD Chairman

### **National Anthem**

### **Ceremonial Lighting of the Lamp**

#### ***Moment of Silence in Memory of:***

#### **H.E. Abdurrahman Wahid**

Former President, Republic of Indonesia  
& CALD Individual Member

### **Welcome Addresses**

#### **Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha**

Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
Chairman, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats  
& Former President, Liberal Party of Sri Lanka

#### **Mr. Siegfried Herzog**

Resident Representative  
Friedrich Naumann Foundation – Manila Office



### Keynote Address

#### **Mr. Lalith Weeratunga**

Secretary to H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa,  
President of Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

### Report by Liberal International (LI) Representative on the LI 2009 Cairo Congress with the theme "Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

#### **Mr. Robert Woodthorpe Browne**

Vice-President and Member of the Bureau, Liberal International  
& Chairman, International Relations Committee of the Liberal  
Democrats, United Kingdom

### Open Forum

1830 H End of Opening Ceremonies

1930 H Welcome Dinner  
*Royal Thai Restaurant*  
*Lobby Level*

### March 2, 2010 – Tuesday

0900 H Registration

0930 H **Session I: Current Obstacles to Choice and Excellence in Education**

#### **Session Chair: Mr. Ng Lip Yong**

Former Deputy Minister of International Trade, Malaysia  
& Central Committee Member, Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia

#### **Speakers:**

*Global Perspective*

#### **Hon. Harunobu Yonenaga, MP**

Vice Director-General of the International Department  
Democratic Party of Japan

#### **Hon. Itsuki Toyama, MP**

Democratic Party of Japan

*East and Southeast Asian Perspective*

#### **Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta**

Former Deputy Secretary General of ASEAN





& Former Chair of the National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS)  
Liberal Party of the Philippines

*South Asian Perspective*

**Dr. Parth Shah**

President

Center for Civil Society, India

Open Forum with Tea & Coffee Break

### 1200 H **Session II: Education for Freedom, Development and Democracy**

**Session Chair:**

**Mr. Nyo Ohn Myint**

Secretary of the Foreign Affairs Committee

National League for Democracy (Liberated Area)

**Speakers:**

**Mr. Barun Mitra**

Founder and Director

Liberty Institute, India

**Hon. Niccolo Rinaldi**

Member of the European Parliament

Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Open Forum

1300 H Lunch

### 1430 H **Session III: Case Studies from Asia - I**

**Session Chair: Mr. Kamal Nissanka**

Leader of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka

& Former Secretary General of CALD

**Speakers:**

**Mr. Amit Kaushik**

Former CEO

Shri Educare Ltd., India

**Mr. Anees Jillani**

Chairman

Liberal Forum Pakistan



Open Forum with Tea & Coffee Break

- 1630 H      End
- 1800 H      Assembly at Hotel Lobby
- 1830 H      Dinner  
              *Wijesinha Residence*  
              *Alfred House Road, Colombo*

### **March 3, 2010 - Wednesday**

- 0900 H      Registration
- 0930 H      **Session IV: Case Studies from Asia - II**

#### **Session Chair:**

**Mr. Sylvester Lim**

Singapore Democratic Party

#### **Speakers:**

**Dr. Upali Sedere**

Director General, National Institute of Education  
& Chief Adviser to the Ministry of Education  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

**Hon. Sam Rainsy, MP**

Leader of the Cambodian Opposition  
(Sam Rainsy Party)  
& Former CALD Chair

**Hon. Lau Chin Hoon**

State Assemblyman of Pemanis  
& Chairman of Education and Knowledge Society Bureau  
Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia

**Prof. Ying Shih**

President of the Humanistic Education Foundation  
Democratic Progressive Party of Taiwan

Open Forum with Tea & Coffee Break

- 1300 H Lunch



1430 H

**Session V: Liberalism and the Promotion of Choice and  
Excellence in Education**

**Session Chair:**

**Prof. Juan Miguel Luz**

Associate Dean, Center for Development Management  
Asian Institute of Management

**Speakers:**

**Mr. Robert Woodthorpe Browne**

Vice-President and Member of the Bureau, Liberal International  
& Chairman, International Relations Committee of the Liberal  
Democrats, United Kingdom

**Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha**

Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
Chairman, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats  
& Former President, Liberal Party of Sri Lanka

Open Forum with Tea & Coffee Break

1630 H

**Closing Ceremonies**

**Session Chair: Hon. Ong-Art Klampaiboon, MP**

Democrat Party Thailand  
Founding Secretary General of CALD

**Closing Keynote Address**

**Mr. Premasara Epasinghe**

Private Secretary of Hon. A.D. Susil Premajayantha  
Minister of Education  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

**Closing Remarks CALD, FNF and LPSL**

**Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha**

Secretary of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights  
Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka  
Chairman, Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats  
& Former President, Liberal Party of Sri Lanka

**Mr. Siegfried Herzog**

Resident Representative  
Friedrich Naumann Foundation – Manila Office



# CALD COLOMBO CONFERENCE 2010

"CHOICE AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION"



Liberal Party of Sri Lanka



Council of  
Asian Liberals  
and Democrats

Friedrich Naumann  
STIFTUNG

FÜR DIE FREIHEIT

COLOMBO, SRI LANKA | 1-3 MARCH 2010

**Mrs. Swarna Amaratunga**

President

Liberal Party of Sri Lanka

1730 H      End of Conference

Variable      Departure



### SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

#### OPENING CEREMONIES

The conference commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, a traditional Sri Lankan practice, involving representatives from CALD member parties and partner organizations. This was followed by a moment of silence in memory of H.E. Abdurrahman Wahid, Former President of the Republic of Indonesia and CALD individual member.

The chair of the Opening Ceremonies, former CALD Chairman Hon. Sam Rainsy, MP, then introduced current CALD Chair Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha and FNF Manila Resident Representative Mr. Siegfried Herzog. Both extended their warm welcome to the participants.

In particular, Dr. Wijesinha expressed his gratitude to: the keynote speaker, Mr. Lalith Weeratunga; all the participants from CALD member-parties; to FNF; to the Liberal Forum Pakistan; to the non-government organizations represented from India; and to the participants from all over Sri Lanka- from Jaffna, Trincomalee, Kalmunai (Ampara), Matara, and Moneragala.

In addition, Mr. Siegfried Herzog emphasized why choice and excellence are key ingredients in a good education system wherein competition can create better outcomes. He stressed the importance of choice with the idea that education is not necessarily used for "indoctrination" as well as giving people choice "to choose schools that best reflect the values they wanted to be imparted with their children." On the other hand, excellence, for Mr. Herzog is key because "only quality education can give the real benefits, can provide people with the skills."

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#### Education in Sri Lanka

"Because education is one of the most important factors in progress, I have a slightly platonic view of education. I think that sometimes many people make mistakes due to ignorance, due to lack of awareness about the positive qualities of the values that we cherish so much, and I believe that if we move our education forward, make it dynamic, introduce choice and excellence, this country too will go far...I know that it is true for many of our countries, I hope that the experiences we will be sharing here, the discussions we will have, will allow all of us to move forward more positively in the future."

**Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha**

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#### Education and Liberalism

"Education, of course is also a key liberal concern. Liberals are concerned, as you all know, about the equality of access and the equality of opportunity, not like the socialist's equality of outcome. But if we care about equality of access, education becomes crucial for giving people the skills to indeed access economic opportunities, social or political opportunities, and without the skills from education, one cannot participate. Education can also be a tool for social transformation and social mobility, the most powerful tool of the disadvantaged. Education is also important for strengthening the individual which is of course a core liberal concern. Liberals believe in individual freedom and individual responsibility but these places a lot of responsibility on the individual who needs a critical mind and an analytical mind, and again this is something we get mainly from education."

**Mr. Siegfried Herzog**





Mr. Lalith Weeratunga, Secretary to Sri Lankan President H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, delivered the keynote address on the President's behalf, where he highlighted the important milestones in the history of Liberal Party of Sri Lanka and of the country in general. He then elaborated on the state of education in Sri Lanka, noting that the country has consistently maintained an outstanding literacy rates record despite its limited resources. He noted, however, that much more needs to be done in terms of promoting quality education, particularly in the highly essential fields of information technology, science and mathematics. Mr. Weeratunga also placed emphasis on the "need to bring people together, to promote understanding and tolerance." He was keen to promote the "need to develop systems that can encourage synthesis and synergies" including educational exchanges, long and short-term scholarships, language camps, extracurricular activities that facilitate comradeship and "developed through a range of individual initiatives and public private partnerships." He concluded his speech with a saying from a Scottish priest: "The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice and because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little that we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds."

### Practical Approach to Education

"The state should not do everything in education. But it must make sure that whatever is done benefits our people. Monitoring and evaluation should not however be on the basis of uniformity because we need to recognize the different ways in which ideals can be achieved. We should refrain from acting on the basis just of theories since we know particularly in the field of education, that these can rapidly become outdated. We need then to be purely practical in our approach, to look to the usefulness and the employability of the products of various systems. We must encourage different approaches and judge them with an open mind, looking to the end results in terms of benefits to individuals as well as the country."

**Mr. Lalith Weeratunga**

Immediately after the keynote address, Mr. Robert Woodthorpe Browne, Liberal International (LI) Vice-President and Member of the Bureau, reported on the results of the 2009 LI Cairo Congress on education. The Congress, with the theme "Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", was attended by more than 300 delegates from different parts of the world, including those coming from Asia, Latin America and Africa. He concluded with an idea borrowed from Martin Lee of Hong Kong: that there is no such thing as "Asian Democracy" because this, he explained, is a concept of tyrants to entrench their undemocratic control. It was in this same vein that he stated that "liberal ideas of human rights and liberty belong in every society on this planet."



### Session I: Current Obstacles to Choice and Excellence In Education

Facilitated by Mr. Ng Lip Yong, Central Committee Member of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, the session identified the general and most important obstacles to promoting choice and excellence in education from both global and regional perspectives.

Mr. Ng Lip Yong started the session by noting that with the diversity of the countries in Asia (the distinction between developing and developed countries and the distinction in developing countries of multiethnic, multilingual, multi-religious or pluralistic societies in Asia in comparison to Japan which is a relatively homogenous society), the obstacles to education will be quite diverse as well but stressed on particular obstacles to education such as limited financial resources and the "brain drain" from developing countries to developed countries.

#### Global Perspective

Members of Parliament from Japan, Hon. Harunobu Yonenaga and Hon. Itsuki Toyama, tackled the issue from a global standpoint. Drawing from the experience of Japan, they pointed out that the country's economic development facilitated the reduction of the state's role in education as this produced a middle class capable of paying the cost of their children's education. At present, however, the gap between the rich and poor widened considerably, which, according to the speakers, necessitated a rethinking of state policy on education.

Hon. Yonenaga focused on the theme of "The Problems of Japanese Education and Its Warning Signs." Hon. Yonenaga first discussed Japan's education sector noting that Japan's spending on education compared to percentage of GDP is one of the lowest among the OECD countries with extremely low government spending on secondary and higher education. He then noted that compulsory education in Japan which is free is only until junior high school or at 15 years of age. He pointed out the current problems of Japan in terms of education, namely: (1) a diminishing middle-class population who is unwilling and unable to support the education of their children; (2) a sharp disparity between the rich and the poor that reduce the chance of children from less fortunate households to earn even a minimum education and; (3) a heavy burden on the state given low birth rates and an ageing population that increase government's welfare costs for health care.

After discussing the above, he issued a warning to developing nations in Asia currently experiencing incredible economic growth: "The issues currently facing Japan may be lying in wait for you in the future. You should engineer a complete change of direction while you still have time to avoid what is happening in Japan for the last 25 years." He then shared some anecdotes on the "exam war period" in 1960's Japan, on the prevalence of preparatory schools for every level of education in Japan, on the rise of junior high colleges and professional colleges as an alternative to prestigious universities in Japan. He noted that it was during this period of "exam war" that diversity of education and a number of education options in Japan



### On Quality Education

"Japanese education is more diverse and more advanced but the creation of an equal higher education environment is still developing. Diverse and high quality education only counts upon and should only be based upon a universal higher education system. Minimum level of secondary and higher education should not be impoverished by placing too much effort into pursuing diversity in higher levels of education."

**Hon. Harunobu Yonenaga**

became possible and available. He however highlighted the need for society, Japanese society in particular, to rethink what education really is.

Hon. Yonenaga then related the aftermath of this period of "exam war." According to him, it was after this period that the bubble economy burst. This led Japan into consecutive waves of recession. There was a subsequent re-evaluation of the lifetime employment system, and an increase in number of agency workers because of deregulations. This eventually caused a dramatic reduction in the number of university graduates being recruited by corporations. It was during this period that the myth of graduating from the best universities can ensure you a good position in a corporation was shattered. Even if young people graduated from top universities, people were not able to secure employment. This, according to Hon. Yonenaga, is the period of "job hunting ice

age." This resulted in a situation where in those from professional colleges were highly evaluated than those from universities. The falling birth rate also meant a decrease in the total number of potential students. As a result, many education institutions were forced to close down.

Hon. Yonenaga then concluded with two important recommendations:

- It is time that children should receive a minimum level of secondary and higher level of education
- Parents should create an appropriate environment to support this.

Hon. Itsuki Toyama, MP (Democratic Party of Japan) then presented the current policies on education of the Japanese government led by the Democratic Party of Japan that aims to address the above issues presented by Hon. Yonenaga. The DPJ, in particular, was focused on the inclusion of measures to make high school education free and to establish a new child allowance in the budget for fiscal year 2010 (As of writing, the Diet has enacted such legislation). He also noted that the budget for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has been increasing by 5.9% in comparison with previous years. The budget for education alone has been increasing by 8.1%. He highlighted that such funding was to increase the number of teaching professionals and to make high school education free. The target for the number of teachers has increased from 800 last year to 2200 this year and it was the first time in seven years that there was a real increase. In addition, he noted that 393.3 billion yen was allotted in the budget to fund state high school education, to make tuition free and to provide assistance to those attending private high schools.

Hon. Toyama reiterated that higher education in Japan was not free such that there was a need to enact legislation that shall make tuition in state high school free



of charge. Such measure shall decrease the gap between state and private high school education. Furthermore, a certain amount of scholarship funding shall also be made available to students in private high schools and the like. Implementation of such measures shall enable students to study regardless of their parent's socioeconomic status and reduce the economic burden related to education and to provide equal education opportunities and eventually bring Japan up to the standards of other OECD nations.

Hon. Toyama added that in the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology Kawabata's recent policy speech to the Diet, he specifically raised the point that: "all those with the desire to do so should receive high quality education." He also drew attention to the fact that the minister linked this statement to the elimination of Japanese reservations of the right not to be bound to progressively introduce secondary and tertiary education in the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights.

Furthermore, Hon. Toyama noted that to address the problems of low birth rate and an ageing society, there was also the proposal for legislation to give a monthly educational allowance for each child until graduation from junior high school. The proposal was for a 13000 yen monthly allowance for each child regardless of how many children a couple has. According to him, this shall also provide encouragement to young couples who have given up on sending their children to school for higher education or have given up having children altogether. In conclusion, he hoped that the conference in a liberal democratic fashion will allow everyone to focus, exchange information and cooperate to create a better society.

### East and Southeast Asian Perspective

Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta, Former Deputy Secretary General of ASEAN and Former Chair of the National Institute for Policy Studies (NIPS) in the Philippines, looked at the issue in the context of East and Southeast Asian countries. After identifying the various obstacles to choice and excellence in education, he made the argument that the "worst roadblock to quality education is the elitist mindset that the poor do not deserve a level-playing field." This, according to him, has to be addressed in order to make quality education for all a reality.

He reviewed East Asia's record in

#### **On Elitism and Education**

*"The worst roadblock to quality education is the elitist mindset that the poor do not deserve a level-playing field. This is unfortunately true in most of our countries, whether consciously or unconsciously manifested. The resistance to change and the feeling of permanent entitlement are always blamed on the people. However, it is elements within the elite that prevent equalization of opportunities so that they can remain as the chief beneficiaries of public goods. By perpetuating the status quo, the elites are assured of their superior position in society amidst a sea of less-educated, vulnerable and dependent masses. The powerlessness of the many and the changelessness of social relationships guarantee for the elite their firmament of power and wealth. In our traditional societies, the "ignorantization" of the majority has been institutionalized by limiting access to quality education. The unwillingness of policy makers to raise the minimum standards of education and health care serves to permanentize the mediocrity of the poor and to justify myths about their inferior social status."*

**Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta**





education, noting that: "East Asia assigns less importance to education in government budgets than do several other developing regions." He then discussed a number of obstacles to quality education in East Asia namely: (1) poverty; (2) malnutrition; (3) gender disparity; (4) shortage of qualified teachers; (5) disadvantaged position of indigenous minorities; (6) child labor; (7) conflict areas and; (8) disabilities of children. He then presented his personal view on what the main obstacle to quality education in East Asia is- an elitist mindset. Dr. Villacorta argued that corrupt governance is the root of poverty and marginalization. Corruption becomes according to him, the worst violation of human rights because it deprives the population, especially children, of much-needed public services and infrastructure. According to him, corruption is the worst violation of human rights because it deprives the population, especially children, of much-needed public services and infrastructure. In conclusion, he cited a speech by former CALD Chair Hon. Sam Rainsy on corruption in 2002.

### South Asian Perspective

Dr. Parth Shah, President of the Center for Civil Society in India, viewed the issue using South Asian lenses. Looking at the successes of India on education, he claimed that there should be a shift from 'right to education' to "right to education of choice".

He focused on the School Choice Campaign of the Center for Civil Society in the context of proposed reforms in the education system in India. The idea of choice in education, according to Dr. Shah, is based on Article 26 of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which states that everyone has a right to free and compulsory education and emphasized on the parents' prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Obstacle	Solution
Public funding for education is a lump-sum grant without any link to the number of students that education institutions serve.	For transparency and accountability, convert all public funding to per child or per student funding (unique student ID).
Government schools are tied to the national bureaucracy.	Autonomy to all schools, particularly state schools (principal as leader)
Annual or board exams that are high stake assessments i.e., pass or fail.	Independent, regular learning outcome assessment (not annual or board exams): how the child has learned; how much has he learned; where he is behind; that will help the parent, the teacher and the principal to figure out how to bring the child up to the standards that have been set.
Government school teachers are not very accountable; Teachers do not actually show up on school days and even some of those present are not engaged in teaching activities	Rating of school empowers parents- informed parental choice
Regulation barriers in India in establishing private schools. No standards for public schools.	Accountability: School management committee
	Treat private and public, for-profit and non-profit education equally

Dr. Shah then recommended that in each country, there must be a change of debate from right to education to right to education of choice. He emphasized the School Choice campaign aimed towards influencing policy makers, politicians, and most especially parents to reform the education system in India.





### Why a Focus on Choice

- Empowerment of parents
- Equity/equality of opportunity
- Deregulation and liberalization of the education system: consumers can have choice only when producers do
- Competition
- Accountability
- Personalized education, not mass production
- Decentralized delivery, many types of schools including community schools
- Innovation as a key component towards diversity in education
- Liberty

**Dr. Parth Shah**

After identifying the numerous benefits that can be derived from emphasizing choice, he then proposed measures to promote choice in education like scholarships, cash vouchers and conditional cash transfers. He noted that the area of focus of the School Choice Campaign is the school voucher or per child or per student funding. He then explained the mechanism of the school voucher such that the parent chooses the school where they will send their children. Dr. Shah, in conclusion, cited the Right to Education Act in India, which allows poor children to have access to private schools. The government will sponsor these students (approximately two million) to be able to go to private schools for their education and this may well be the largest school voucher program in the world when it is implemented.

In closing, Mr. Ng Lip Yong, the session chair, noted that in most Southeast countries, the more prevalent problem in education is not choice, but the lack of access to education. He also cited the need to have access to the internet from which the problem of "digital divide" for governments becomes apparent. He highlighted that technology is just an enabler for governments to be transparent and accountable. Mr. Ng advocated for education free of corruption- an education for the masses. Such education, according to him, can further develop into a civil society that can uphold the values and ideals of liberal democracy.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. *Priority Budget Allocation for Education: Populist or Social Welfare?*

An issue regarding a large budget allocation for education was raised by Hon. Ong Art Klampaiboon (Democrat Party, Thailand). The notion of allocating a large amount of the national budget to education could be misunderstood as a populist rather than welfare cost. Dr. Villacorta responded that the amount of budget allocated is important more so in the enforcement and the way the allocation is detailed in the budget for education. In addition, Hon. Yonenaga replied by discussing one reason for the present Japanese government's reform of education policies: elite dominance in society which was designed and led by bureaucrats in the past liberal democrat administration. In addition, Dr. Shah noted that one could also use populism to pursue a liberal end and not necessarily as a bad thing given their experience in their school choice campaign where politicians can give education vouchers for children instead of dole-outs.



### 2. *School Voucher System: Problem with Choice*

Another issue was raised by Hon. Ong Art Klampaiboon (Democrat Party, Thailand) on the school voucher system noting that it could create a problem towards choosing the better-known schools. To this, Dr. Shah responded that we could create more better-known schools if there are few such schools. Allowing competition among schools would also allow for the growth of quality schools. But this process, according to Dr. Shah must be allowed to happen.

In addition, Mr. Siegfried Herzog also noted that there was the Philippine government's experiment with the school voucher system that was eventually high-jacked by populism. To this, Prof. Juan Miguel Luz responded that there was no school voucher system in the Philippines but there was a service contract system wherein private schools were contracted by the government, which are then accredited to look for graduates from public schools to be enrolled in private schools. He then referred to a school voucher system that was done during election time in 2007 which caused a number of problems in relation to monitoring, regularity, continuity and misuse.

Adding to the discussion was Nirmali Hettiarachchi (Cambridge International Examinations, Sri Lanka) who asked whether there would be a pre-evaluation for students entering schools of their choice in the school voucher system. She raised the issue in consideration of maintaining the excellence of schools and in relation to the case of private schools in Sri Lanka. Dr. Shah, in response, noted that the voucher system was not really a novel idea because it has been tried in many other countries. There are many cases, according to him, from which we can learn from. He also highlighted that school vouchers, conditional cash transfers, service contracts and scholarships are all forms of private-public partnerships that would allow parents and children who do not have access to better schools to have access to such schools through government funding. He suggested that we should evaluate which system is compatible for the education in our countries.

Hon. Yonenaga also noted that school choice is not necessarily equal to the best choice- but is relative to the specialization of such schools. He emphasized that parents have the responsibility to research about the schools they want to send their children to.

### 3. *Gender discrimination vs. Gender Equality in Education in the Philippines*

Mr. Siegfried Herzog (Friedrich Naumann Foundation) argued that Dr. Villacorta's presentation regarding gender discrimination was somewhat unfair because the Philippines is actually one of the most remarkable countries in terms of gender equality in education. He cited that in the Philippines, women consistently do better than men: 70% of college graduates were women and women outnumbered men in the social sciences, law and engineering. This was primarily because of an education system that does not discriminate but instead



gives opportunity to women. This was also true in Malaysia as noted by Mr. Ng Lip Yong.

This was backed up by Prof. Juan Miguel Luz (Liberal Party of the Philippines) who noted that the Philippine is fast becoming a country of male underachievers. This stemmed from an education system and education cycle that is too short that it does not build a solid foundation. According to Prof. Luz, this was also related to the rise in domestic violence because with the wife being more accomplished than their husbands, the husband could only assert his dominance with violence.

In response, Dr. Villacorta noted that he did mention in his presentation that women do participate and are represented in different professions. This however was more attributed to the aggressiveness and talents of our women rather than to the conduciveness of the social and education system in the Philippines.

On the other hand, Hon. Yonenaga emphasized that in Japan, gender disparity is related to life expectancy in Japan. Data showed that women live seven years longer than men, in average. He again highlighted the problem of a decreasing labour force because of an ageing society in Japan which can be addressed, according to him by giving priority in providing education to women.

#### *4. Teachers as Stakeholders and their Profession*

Ravi Pratap Singh (AIDE Action) noted that the voucher scheme in India has a big problem with 16 million children that has no access to education. He asked if there was a way to see that we do not look at the best choice but instead start thinking at any choice as the best choice. He cited studies on the Indian education system showing that the government school teachers were more highly trained and more highly qualified but still there is lack of choice. He recommended that we look at every school available especially in rural India. He also suggested that we look at teachers as prime movers or as stakeholders for quality education.

In relation to this, Mr. Ng Lip Yong (Parti Gerakan Rakyat, Malaysia) noted a problem in Malaysia wherein there is a scarcity of teachers in rural schools. This stemmed from the notion that teaching has been the last choice as a profession in Malaysia.

Hon. Yonenaga in addition, noted that the last administrations' policy of re-evaluation and retraining of teachers every ten years proved to be a good thing for the education system in Japan.

#### *5. Corruption and the Trickle Down Effect*

Mr. Anees Jillani (Liberal Forum, Pakistan) asked Dr. Villacorta why he believed that corruption promotes poverty whereas there is the notion of the trickle-down effect. Dr. Villacorta, in response, argued that the trickle-down effect is about encouraging more investments, more businesses, more jobs, and a



better working environment and not about corruption. Dr. Villacorta argued that corruption actually prevents the trickle-down effect.

## Session II: Education for Freedom, Development And Democracy

The second session, chaired by Mr. Nyo Ohn Myint focused on education as an instrument for freedom, development and democracy. He started the session by sharing an anecdote on democracy and education in Burma at the time when he joined the democratic movement in Burma.

### Education and Progress

"There is not one single progressive challenge which is important for liberal democrats that can be addressed without education. These progressive challenges include the integration of disabled people in society, gender equality policies and minority rights. There is no global issue which can be addressed properly without the full role of education, for example, changing social behaviour regarding climate change and the integration of migrants. We should use schools for intercultural dialogue, inter-religious dialogue, of sharing experiences and for multicultural exchanges."

**Hon. Niccolo Rinaldi**

Hon. Niccolo Rinaldi, MEP (ALDE) first acknowledged the excellent cooperation with the network of CALD and Friedrich Naumann Foundation-Asia. He then shared an anecdote on his experience in Afghanistan as a UN Officer back in the 1990s with the youth of Afghanistan who were deprived of education during that time because of government restrictions and policies. Hon. Rinaldi noted that while education is important for individual development, its more significant role lies in building a sense of community and belongingness in every person. Education, for one, undoubtedly includes "an appropriation of the country's past, a sense of ownership where we come from and a representation of a people's culture", which is of vital significance for the people to know the direction they want

to take in the future. He expressed concerns with the growing pessimism and laziness of the youth in Europe to support further European integration and the establishment of the European Constitution. He remarked that there is lack of proper education in terms of ownership of the past. He also expressed concern that unfortunately and quite paradoxically, in state budgets, cuts always start with the education budget even if providing education is far more than addressing the basic needs of the population.

He noted that education has a constitutional value since there are a number of issues that could not be addressed without education: social mobility, leadership training and formation, equality in terms of rights, which are crucial for liberal democracies. He then expressed his advocacy for free access to schools not only in compulsory levels of education but also in universities and the continuous support to improving the education system. He also acknowledged the ageing of European societies that needs to be addressed by policies on education for elder people. Education, he believed, is a life-long process in consideration of the fast-paced technology that is now dominating a person's life. He noted that we should be aware that wherever there is investment in education, there is more employment and in turn, a more stable society. He concluded by accentuating that education's role is essentially to empower the individual to grow.



On the other hand, Mr. Barun Mitra, (Liberty Institute, India) emphasized the problems that emanate from state intervention in education. He argued that the agencies and the resources of the state should not be used in the provision of education, and the private sector must be given a free hand to operate in this sector. State-sponsored education, according to him, had a great tendency to be captured by different interest groups, which try to shape the educational system in accordance with their own interest.

He cited cases of education being used as propaganda as was in Nazi Germany, in Cuba and North Korea. He also encouraged everyone to ask: "education, for what? education, for whom? education, how?" He concurred with the speaker from the previous session that education had become the hand maid of the elite in the education system in India. He emphasized that education had been virtually captured by the elite in the name of providing it to the masses and keeping the masses away completely. He reiterated that we need to ask the how's and why's of education and not the goal because education is not about a specific content, any specific idea, any specific technology or any specific time-education is about the capacity to ask.

### The State and Education

"If we as liberals really think that education will be delivered through agencies of the state or resources of the state, we will not be able to shoulder the responsibility of the tragedies that might inevitably follow. When education is an agency of the state, the focus is on curriculum- into content: not thinking, not asking, not innovating, not questioning. The purpose of education is not content, but to ask- to have the freedom, to have the capacity to ask. A state agency will never and can never give that freedom because it will be captured by various interests in various forms to try to massage it for their own purpose."

**Mr. Barun Mitra**

He shared the idea that if India is today the largest democracy in the world, it was because they allow the thousand year old wisdom of the poor, of the masses, of the illiterate, to vote. He cited that it was not a coincidence that India's economic liberalization reforms started when Indian politics became competitive. Its politics became competitive when the people became aware of the democratic power that they possess. It was then that delivery of services was improved or politicians would be voted out of power or lose their office. That for Mr. Mitra is real education- to acknowledge that the people do possess the capacity. In conclusion, he argued that: "Unless and until we begin to recognize and respect those masses, our political ideas, no matter how good and lofty they are, are unlikely to find resonance among the people."

In closing, Mr. Nyo Ohn Myint, noted the importance of equality of opportunity for the development of free thinking in education as highlighted by Hon. Rinaldi and the importance of liberal values as pointed out by Mr. Mitra.

## DISCUSSION

1. *The growing laziness and pessimism in society.*





Mr. Dwight George Nayoan (Nation Awakening Party, Indonesia) noted that a culture of laziness and pessimism had developed in society especially Indonesian society which could be an impact of Dutch colonialism in Indonesia. He asked how this could be reversed- how to give hope to the new generation. To this, Hon. Rinaldi responded that this would be a difficult task but reiterated that this lack of optimism could be caused by a lack of perspective where we came from, a lack of sense of history. It is to this that the focus of education can play a role, he added, that the youth be able "to have an ownership of the progress of the past."

### *2. The issue of infrastructure*

Mr. Dwight George Nayoan (Nation Awakening Party, Indonesia) also asked why the issue of infrastructure was not raised in the session. He noted that infrastructure is crucial to education especially when the issue is about access. To this, Hon. Rinaldi responded that the state has to realize the importance of universal right of education hence the need to establish both public and private schools in rural, peripheral areas. This should be accompanied by building infrastructure to ensure access. In addition, he advocated that schools be independent and that teachers should be respected as the judiciary is respected in liberal democracies is independent and respected. He noted that in Europe, there was a growing concern over alternatives when there is no access to public schools or in absence of the state or public schools particularly on religious private schools in peripheral urban areas ranging from Christian, Islamic and radical schools.

### *3. Corruption in education*

Hon. Sam Rainsy (Sam Rainsy Party, Cambodia) asked how corruption affects education and society in general. Mr. Mitra responded that corruption is there in many spheres including education: "Corruption happens when the state takes for itself certain privileges and tries to prevent others to enter -either the state regulates or prevents entry. Corruption has gone down in countries who had liberalized their economies and those who had implemented reforms. Corruption in education will go down if education is made open and competitive given the cut throat competition of the market." He reiterated that we should ask if the state has a role in education and what the means to that end is. In sum, he argued for a complete separation between state and education if we are to have a tolerant and pluralistic society. In response, Hon. Rinaldi noted that corruption is a separate topic for a full session but emphasized that there is such a thing termed as legal corruption wherein you force people to pay for education through a private school. This is a problem, he noted, since education should be the first step to avoid corruption: "We expect that the educated are the ones who will first denounce corruption but if the system of education leads to such corruption then there lies the problem."

### *4. Language and political agendas*

Mr. Dwight George Nayoan (Nation Awakening Party, Indonesia) also raised the issue of the prevailing political agenda behind language policies. Language policies were in effect to be carried out by schools. He asked if there is really a need to have such policies. Hon. Rinaldi responded that in the case of Europe, there is a



growing need to learn Chinese and Arabic with the increasing population and influx of migrants.

### Session III: Case Studies from Asia I

Session III, facilitated by Leader of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka Mr. Kamal Nissanka, was composed of two panelists who presented cases from the South Asian subcontinent: Mr. Anees Jillani, Chairman of Liberal Forum Pakistan and Mr. Amit Kaushik, Chief Operating Officer of Pratham Education, India.

Mr. Jillani, in his speech, discussed the state of education in Pakistan and the problems that the educational system confronts. He raised some arguments on several issues on the education system in Pakistan including:

- the message and content of education;
- planning for the future employment of graduates;
- the quality of education whether in public or private schools;
- the elitist mindset and discrimination in the system of education;
- choosing between English and mother-tongue as the language of instruction;
- the quality of teachers;
- the mishandling and misuse of massive foreign aid pouring into Pakistan for education;
- corruption;
- madrasahs as alternatives to public and private schools;
- gender disparity in education caused by socioeconomic and cultural issues;
- child labor and;
- the rise of jihadism in rural areas in Pakistan especially in the bordering territories with Afghanistan.

Mr. Jillani was keen to advocate for: (1) a uniform system of education that will ensure equality of opportunity and equality of access and choice; (2) the proper utilization of resources whether local or from foreign aid and; (3) the modernization of the system of education. He claimed that unless the country invests more on the educational sector, this sector would continue to show dismal performance in the coming years.

At this point, the session chair, Mr. Nissanka raised a question on the impact of the past dictatorships and the ongoing violence on the system of education in Pakistan. He also concurred with the argument on increasing the quality of the system of education in the context of a growing global economy.



### Recommendations for the Education System in Pakistan

- **Public institutions with free and quality education along with proper infrastructure** should be executed throughout the country especially in **rural** areas. Effective policies should be implemented for the **promotion of pre-primary school** as it increases the chances of children to be admitted in primary school which **enhances the skill development and reduces the primary school drop-out rates**.
- **Allocation on education in general and primary education must be increased.** There should be reappraisal of educational priorities and resource allocation in keeping with the global development scenario. Pakistan needs to make significant investment in education if it needs to address its issues related to EFA. The budget allocation framework needs to be reviewed and linked to targets. The public budget allocation has to be raised to 4 per cent of the GDP. However, an allocation of 5-8% of GDP is required to achieve EFA targets by 2015. Accountability to use the budget appropriately should be strengthened and integrated with the development of education.
- The **policies** should be **consistent**. **Political stability** is required for the sustainability of the educational programs. Public sector development program should be reviewed quarterly with special emphasis on high pace projects.
- **Governance** needs to be improved at provincial, district and sub-district levels. The capacity of departments of education for planning and management require strengthening.
- The parliamentarians should convince the **political leadership** of their respective parties to **focus on education**.
- The **procedure to release funds needs to be simplified and decentralized**. The private sector and NGOs should be involved with incentive-oriented approach to generate funds for promotion of education.
- There is need to **amplify liability** in the educational system. Recruitment of teachers should be free from any political influence.
- More emphasis should be given on the **training of primary school teachers**. In this regard, more teacher education institutions should be opened to increase competency of teachers. Moreover, proper teaching staff should be hired in school to eliminate the shortage of teachers in public institutions.
- There is lack of motivation in educational sector due to non-availability of performance based incentives. For this reason **teachers should be well paid**.
- **Class sizes and child-teacher ratio must be kept low**.
- Address the disparity caused by **inter-regional variations in the quality of education**.
- Improve the **quality of instruction**. The curriculum should be moulded according to our national requirements which must be intellectually rich and sufficiently broad to address children's developmental needs in all domains.
- **Immediate legal steps should be taken against extremist organizations and others seeking to prevent or disrupt development, social mobilization and education reform initiatives, especially related to girls.**
- The **Pakistan Madrasa Education Board** should be empowered to revise and standardize the religious and general curriculum. Madrasas linked to extremist groups should be banned.
- **Female education in rural areas** should be encouraged. More girls' primary schools should be opened. **Distant learning programs** for girls can solve the problem of low educational level of women.

#### Source:

Jillani, Anees. 2010. *Education in Pakistan*. Paper presented at the CALD Colombo Conference 2010: Choice and Excellence in Education held 1-3, March 2010 at the Cinnamon Lakeside Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka

For his presentation, Mr. Kaushik first described the legal and political environment that impact on Indian educational policy. He emphasized how the vibrant civil society in India contributed to the educational reforms in India making the right to education as implicit and as a right that flows from the right to life guaranteed in the Indian constitution. He presented a number of challenges to choice in education in India including:

- (1) Large number of villages have only the one dysfunctional government school;
- (2) Fee-charging schools are not always accessible to the poor;
- (3) In the better fee-charging schools, barriers to entry are high;
- (4) Information about relative merits of schools are not easily available.

He then discussed recent developments that support choice in education including:

- (1) Increased awareness of the importance of education
- (2) Passage of the right of children to free and compulsory education act, 2009 requiring recognized private schools to admit up to 25% of their strength from disadvantaged families



- (3) Expression of interest by many corporate groups
- (4) Increase in the number of unrecognized private schools
- (5) Public private partnership proposals from government

He then presented two success stories with regard to education – the Pilot Voucher Programme operated by CCS in New Delhi, and the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) facilitated by Pratham. Both programs, made possible by strong community involvement, succeeded in creating awareness of the possibility of choice and promoting choice.

In conclusion, he stated that school education in India still tend to be state-based with the largest service provider being the state. He also advocated in making the state more accountable and making sure that the quality of education improves.

The session chair, Mr. Nissanka, after highlighting some of the points raised by Mr. Kaushik, noted that in terms of choice, in comparison to Sri Lanka, there has been an increase of international schools and degree-granting higher education institutions that make room for choice in education in India.

### Recommendations for the Education System in India

- reduction of regulation in the school sector;
- allow private investment on a "for-profit" basis;
- introduce a sector regulator to ensure parents and staff are not exploited and;
- encourage public-private-partnerships between government and private service providers.

**Mr. Amit Kaushik**

## DISCUSSION

### 1. *Language of Instruction and Elitism.*

A debate on the relationship between an elitist mindset, English as a medium of instruction being discriminatory and English as a separate subject in school was sparked between the audience and the speakers. Issues were raised whether using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction was better than using English as a medium of instruction as proposed by Mr. Jillani. This was supported by Mr. Kaushik who argued that studies show that children learn more easily in their mother tongue. The issue, he pointed out, was how to balance the learning through their mother tongue and learning English as a foreign or second language.

This was further defended by Dr. Wijesinha who stated that: "Education in their mother tongue as a right is unquestionable but there should be a choice whether they want to be educated in their mother tongue or in English." The main concern, according to Dr. Wijesinha is the expansion of opportunities, in particular, for the worse-off. He then argued against a uniform system of education that might end up perpetuating elitism. This, he emphasized, would demand the need to rethink about this kind of policy noting that there is really no need to be dogmatic.



Mr. Jillani then concurred that there should be equal opportunities for both a poor or rich child to access and go to the same school. Dr. Wijesinha also added to this that the idea was to give some people who are worse-off the opportunity the same as that of who are better-off.

To this, Prof. Ying Shih argued that the rise of Taiwan's bilingual primary schools led to a kind of alienation of the school-going children from their own parents who cannot speak English.

In addition to this, Mr. Kaushik noted that in our present society, finding the adequate number of trained and qualified teachers who speak English and can teach English is also a problem.

Another point was raised by Prof. Shih who noted that it is still better for parents to have the right of choice while the responsibility of the state is to have better public schools.

An issue was raised by Mr. Dwight George Nayoan on why is there a need to keep our mother tongues given the success of English-speaking countries. To this, Mr. Jillani argued that we will be more creative and more productive with our mother tongue. He however, noted, that there really is no problem with learning a second language like English, Chinese or Arabic. He then pointed out that this kind of mentality of preferring English or a foreign language over one's mother tongue is a colonial heritage.

## 2. *Madrasah Education as an Alternative*

Mr. Mitra asked Mr. Jillani on what extent the demand for madrasah reflected the failure of secular education, making madrasah education as a better alternative. To this, Mr. Jillani responded that there are no secular schools in Pakistan, since Islam is compulsory in primary and secondary schools where the majority of the student population are Muslim. The subject of the *Teachings of Islam* however, he noted, is only compulsory for Muslim students such that madrasah students are a different breed from state or private school students. The issue has become: what next for madrasah students who may not pursue further education?





### Session IV: Case Studies From Asia II

More case studies from the Asian region were presented in Session IV, chaired by Singapore Democratic Party's Mr. Sylvester Lim.

Dr. Upali Sedere, Director General, National Institute of Education & Chief Adviser to the Sri Lankan Ministry of Education, opened the session by describing the current status of the educational system in Sri Lanka, the obstacles that it faces, and the lessons that it can learn from other countries in the Asian region. He emphasized the current obstacles to choice and excellence in education in Sri Lanka namely: (1) demand for school admission at Grade 1, 6, 9 and 12; (2) limited choice in curriculum and subjects; (3) disparity in teacher deployment and provincial administrative system; (4) multi-lingual, multi-religious society and practices; (5) choice in learning materials; (6) choice of technology and;

(7) bi-lingual policy and practice. He however emphasized the efforts of the government toward addressing this obstacles including: (1) a free education policy; (2) efforts to balance teacher deployment; (3) a compulsory education policy; (4) scholarship exams and; (5) reform of exam-oriented learning assessments.

#### Policy Recommendations for the Education System in Sri Lanka

- School System Reforms Primary, Middle and High Schools
- Teacher Deployment Policy Reforms
- Teacher Recruitment and Training Policy
- Transition from Traditional Classroom to Digital Media of Instruction

**Dr. Upali Sedere**

In his speech, Hon. Sam Rainsy, MP, Leader of the Cambodian Opposition and former CALD Chair, noted the negative repercussions of the Khmer Rouge regime on Cambodia's educational system. The three pillars of the Khmer Rouge-fear, starvation and ignorance are still in effect with poverty and ignorance perpetuating such legacies in the present administration. Education has become a tool for the present government to cling to power and not a tool to produce critical citizens. Education in Cambodia, according to Hon. Rainsy is a facade of democracy. The brutal regime's influence pervades to this day, according to him, and this must be addressed if Cambodia's educational sector is to move forward.

Hon. Lau Chin Hoon, State Assemblyman of Pemanis & Chairman of Education and Knowledge Society Bureau, Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia, then presented the complexities that characterize the educational system in Malaysia, especially now that the country is in the midst of political and economic transformation. According to Hon. Lau, Vernacular schools are perceived to be better than government-run schools. People choose to send their children to these schools on pragmatic considerations like quality education to prepare for university education, for English, for competitiveness and perceived early training on the value of hard work. This has become an issue for the government and the government has pursued an integrative approach towards enhancing government schools. The challenge for government schools, according to Hon. Lau, is to balance the need and the demand for religion to be included in the curriculum. He also expressed his opinion regarding the issue on language noting that: "It is not the language as medium but the ability of the language to carry knowledge and content." He also



argued that education must be seen as a sacred vehicle not to be tampered with politics. He concluded with a saying from the Diamond Sutra as a way of appreciating knowledge and being careful with how we comprehend concepts and how we look at people: "Those who know the discourse on dharma as like unto a raft, should forsake dharmas, still more so no-dharmas."

The last speaker of the session is Prof. Ying Shih, President of the Humanistic Education Foundation in Taiwan. He began his presentation with the statement on the task and dilemma of Taiwan's education: "Free education is to help everyone to become his or her self- the free people. The free people builds a free country. The

### **The Forest School in Taiwan**

- Financially independent, trains its own teachers, designs its own curriculum
- Not officially recognized by the government
- Leads the direction of education reform
- Pushes many restrictions lifted

**Prof. Ying Shih**

free country provides free education." After providing a narrative of events which impact on the educational system of Taiwan (from Japanese colonial education to authoritarian education to modernized education), he tackled the educational reforms that were done in order to improve the country's educational system. He also shared their initiative for an alternative education system in the Forest School. He however noted that recently, the system of education is turning backwards with the influence of reforms being washed out.

## DISCUSSION

### *1. Cambodia and Education*

Mr. Dwight George Nayoan asked how CALD and other foundations could contribute to help the children in Cambodia. Hon. Rainsy responded that education and democracy go together and that the Friedrich Naumann Foundation had been helping the party in promoting education by helping them promote democracy not only in formal education but also in education outside of the school system in Cambodia. The quality of education in Cambodia, he noted, is part of the facade of democracy. Through the media however, FNF and CALD can help promote education in Cambodia that can lead to democratic change.

Ms. Shri Devi (Aide et Action, South Asia), in addition, asked about any teachers' union associated with the SRP and whether they have created a dent in the system given that the teachers in Cambodia are highly unionized. Hon. Rainsy responded that even if there are many teachers' unions in Cambodia, they have limited freedom. With an atmosphere of fear, he noted that union leaders are getting assassinated and teachers are prevented from joining unions because school masters threaten them with fines or reassignment to far provinces. He added that the government plays with fear and poverty such that people are paralyzed. He however noted that ignorance is the weakest point of the regime which can help combat the regime by promoting education and choice.



Hon. Rainsy also added that: "The modern approach is not to think about cost- but the human investment and productivity of the economy brought about by education. Some people may argue that to be truly liberal, we should not allow the state to interfere in education." He argued that there needs to be a standard so it is not anarchic. He added that a mafia replaced the state in Cambodia with such anarchy. Under the pretext of liberalization, the government of Cambodia privatized education to avoid public service and to corrupt from such a system: "we still need an entity that has the good of the public in mind."

### 2. *Religious Education in Malaysia*

Mr. Nayoan also asked how important religious education in Malaysia is. Hon. Lau clarified that religious schools may be built by the government but they are operated through community funds like Chinese schools. There is an apparent weight given to religious education in Malaysia since Islam is an official religion. He however asked if there could be a moderate democratic state in terms of religious affairs.

### 3. *Forest School in Taiwan*

Mr. Nayoan also raised a question about the forest school. Prof. Shih responded that the forest school was an alternative to the school system when it was established. It was the time when the DPP won the local elections and was able to provide a cover for the forest school. Though it may not be recognized by the government, it is being supported by the DPP. Prof. Shih also noted that the forest school was financed through help from outside sources which was proof that they are doing their job as a provider of alternative education.

In addition, Mr. Browne shared what the forest school movement in Europe has progressed into though it is different from approach of the forest school in Taiwan. Forest schools in Britain, he noted, were catered to unruly students who aside from formal education inside the classroom will learn about nature and the environment outside the classroom. He noted that this forest school programmes had become associated with "learning with pleasure" for students.

Dr. Wilfrido Villacorta (Liberal Party of the Philippines) also asked about the extent of freedom to allow the child which can range from being authoritarian to being over-indulgent. He noted that liberal education is not about anarchy in the classroom. He however condemned the behaviour of any child who would scream at the teacher in front of the class which is beyond the bounds of civility. This, according to him, is not about importing western values but about a minimum standard of civil behaviour. He said that any teaching method should be based on scientific research on child learning and development.

To this, Prof. Shih responded by sharing an anecdote on the research by Pierre Jean and a current research that shows that children think differently. Free education, which he is advocating, will have to give time for children to learn polite manners. "Good manners is the highest value in society that we cannot force them to learn before they appreciate it," he added.



Hon. Lau also noted that in Malaysia, caning is allowed in order to control the class and to respect the right of students to learn peacefully especially when there are class bullies. With regard to values education, the issue is the quality of teachers and the ratio of teachers to students.

Hon. Rainsy, at this point, noted that there is no freedom without choice and with choice, there is responsibility. He also suggested that we raise the issue of responsibility from the consequence of choice. We must make sure, he added, that in the mind of the child, freedom and responsibility should go together. In the forest school, they train the child to be able to challenge authority, respect people who hate them and know the right from the wrong.

#### 4. *Evolution of the content of education*

Ms. May Sing Yang asked each speaker about the teaching of values like human rights, liberalism, history and equality of gender in their respective countries. In response, Hon. Lau noted that in Malaysia's system of education overwhelmed by examination, teachers are not really educating such values at all and thus there is a need for parental support to teach such humanistic values. There is a growing argument in Malaysia against secular schools. He also emphasized that there was an apparent lack of appreciation for such values like liberalism in the system of education in Malaysia.

Hon. Rainsy also responded noting that history is written by the winner. He said that: "if we are liberals we should give the means and opportunity to challenge the official version of history since liberalism is about "doubting". He noted that history was not really taught in schools in Cambodia. He emphasized that the issue is really about – what is true, what is accurate and what is politically correct. "This is a test if a society is really liberal and democratic," he noted. In Cambodia, he advocates for new textbooks that depict the two versions or theories of Cambodia's history and let people choose which one is closest to historical truth and which to believe. "There is a vested political interest to present things differently and hide the truth," he noted. In addition, Mr. Browne emphasized that: "it is only when you study history from another view or perspective will you learn history."

The chair, Mr. Lim, also shared an anecdote that in Singapore, when Mr. Lee Kuan Yew issued a mandate for Confucianism to be taught in schools because of Western values being taught in schools made women more intelligent. Even with a Western education, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had Asian male chauvinistic values with this kind of policy which is still prevalent up to now, he added.

Prof. Shih reiterated that history is written by winners but textbooks, he noted, are written by idiots. He promotes free discussion in the classroom rather than reliance on any textbook noting that textbooks are mainly reference for teachers. He added that in 1997, the *Understanding Taiwan* course was included in the curriculum though the focus of history in Taiwan is China. He noted that children hate what they learn because children are being taught through rote learning (memorization of lessons) which led them to not appreciate Taiwan. This makes it a very serious



struggle, according to Prof. Shih. Moving forward is unsuccessful and the KMT is now moving backward in terms of the education system and the curriculum.

Dr. Wijesinha noted that the previous discussion justified the theme of the conference but also observed that there is much dogma that is coming out from liberals in these discussions. He reminded everyone that we are fallible, and that we may get it wrong. He asked: why not allow choice in any issue whether in the curriculum, in textbooks, or content. He shared what happened in Sri Lanka and noted that the Ministry of Education monopolized the writing of the textbooks that were provided freely to students. There is no substitute to choice, according to Dr. Wijesinha and advocates that choice be always made available.

Mr. Mitra agreed with Dr. Wijesinha and noted that every one of the speakers in the conference underscored the hazard of politicizing education. He voiced the need to endorse not just choice in terms of curriculum and teachers but also choice in ownership and management of schools. The state should not be allowed to virtually strike out alternatives for education and claim complete monopoly over the education which is practically unnecessary.

### *5. Additional Issues on Education in Sri Lanka*

Dr. Newton Peiris (Liberal Party of Sri Lanka) raised additional points on the system of education in Sri Lanka. He noted that the private sector's involvement in education was not mentioned in Dr. Sedere's presentation. He emphasized that there is no public private partnership in education in Sri Lanka such that in private schools, children have to pay for their education as well as their textbooks. He added that even with the reforms on the system of education, the private sector providing education had been a mess. In example, he cited that universities are run by government ministries which discriminate applicants. He also cited that in private schools, there is really no choice in the curriculum and in the medium of instruction.

Dr. Wijesinha also added that we need to recognize that the system of education is very good at the basic levels. He also recognized the need to expand university education. He reiterated what Dr. Sedere noted that we have free education but we should have freedom for education to let the private sector function better. One big problem, he noted, is a mindset is that we have state support for education but practically, we should also allow private sector involvement in education.

### *6. Education Reforms in Taiwan*

Ms. Huai Hui Hsieh (DPP, Taiwan) recognized that education is important for liberalism and democracy and that process is also important for education and enlightenment. In addition, she noted that the education policies that they advocated were not really popular which is apparent from the complaints from teachers, students and parents. This was beside the fact that many agree on the reforms but many also complain about such reforms. Prof. Shih responded that reforms were done through the request of the people but many were short-changed. He also doubted the notion that education was the main ingredient for the economic development of Taiwan because we need little money and a lot of peace. He





believed that: "We cannot wait for our children to save us but we have to save our children first to give them bread and give them a peaceful home for them to learn and maybe in the future build a better Taiwan."

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### **FYI Supplement**

After the open forum, Dr. Wijesinha discussed the confusion raised before between the human rights situation in Sri Lanka and the war on terrorism. He also voiced the recognition that the war on terrorism in Sri Lanka was less violent than any other war. He also showed that they started education immediately in relation to the confidence-building, resettlement and rehabilitation of adult and child LTTE combatants. Demining and rebuilding of infrastructure were of primary concern especially in school areas. He also shared stories on the efforts of rehabilitation in former LTTE territories. He also asked the audience that they distinguish what the ministry is doing in the North. He noted that a national framework was developed with ILO and UNDP to classify former combatants and what and to what extent their rehabilitation will be.

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### **Session V: Liberalism and the Promotion of Choice and Excellence in Education**

The last session was on liberalism and the promotion of choice and excellence in education, which raised the issue on the political priorities of liberals in the field of education. Ably facilitated by Mr. Juan Miguel Luz, Associate Dean of the Center of Development Management in Manila-based Asian Institute of Management, the session brought back LI's Mr. Robert Woodthorpe Browne and LPSL's Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha.

Mr. Browne began by highlighting the notion that: "poor or inappropriate education whether by accident or design, condemns its victims to a form of slavery, and to exploitation by employers, bureaucrats and governments." He argued that if learning is truly our infinite resource, then it is our responsibility to encourage learning and to encourage choice, differentiation and the promotion of individual talents. He also argued from the belief that a truly differentiated and liberal model pays equal attention to vocational, practical as well as academic training. He added that school should not be about facts and lectures- but about character-building and decision-making. He also emphasized the importance of the right kind of education in bringing to the fore the values that liberals hold dear such as self-determination, individual freedom, and ability to question decisions made for and about them.

In addition, Mr. Browne, noted that: "originality and self-determination, curiosity and creativity are not traits learned equally throughout life- the foundations are laid very early on and must be encouraged from the beginning." At the same time, he also noted the inefficiencies that attend education by indoctrination, as this stunts not only individual development but also societal growth. He also emphasized that liberalism encourages differentiation so that each individual has the choice to better his or herself and to contribute to the whole as opposed to simply standing by. He further argued that liberalism calls for education from the cradle to the grave-help



should be available throughout one's life to re-train, to adapt to new things and to learn new skills and ideas.

Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha, on the other hand, observed that while the right to basic education has been embodied in many international agreements, there are still many countries which lag behind on its observance or implementation. He also raised concern on the state's role on education, and its possible implications for promoting choice and excellence in the educational sector.

Dr. Wijesinha called for a constant reaffirmation of the right to education; and reassurance that this right is a responsibility of the state and is exercised; and that a reassessment on the increased role of the state in education. He noted that in Sri Lanka, they underestimated the need for regulation and responsibility in the economic free-for-all that some governments encourage. There is an obvious need for continuing state intervention in the form of selective support and monitoring to ensure protection for the most vulnerable when market forces fall apart. He also resonated that liberals believed in a small strong state comparing it to the unique experience of Sri Lanka where *statism* was taken to a ridiculous extent in the system of education. He confessed that Sri Lanka aimed to provide education for all but they did it with inadequate resources such that they were unable to provide excellence for a vast majority of its students. Their excellence in basic education, according to Dr. Wijesinha, is supplemented by theoretically irregular institutions and a massive private industry. He feared that they simply could not provide education at the higher level in terms of numbers as well as skills and this resulted to brain drain as well as a drain on resources as the young seek education abroad and thus the best and the brightest are lost to other countries. He cited a number of remedies to these problems including: the need to facilitate long lasting peace by ensuring opportunities for all and; turning to liberal philosophy to provide a healthy education system.

Dr. Wijesinha noted that Sri Lanka is falling behind in technology and skills that they need for rapid development. He reminded everyone that the pursuit of excellence cannot be in the expense of universality. However, the resilience in the displaced populations in Sri Lanka will support the basis of human dignity through education. Their commitment to education bodes well for the enhanced efficiency they must aim for as education and advanced training has become more important. He advocated that they must ensure that they embrace the opportunities that a country finally at peace can provide. He concluded by noting that liberal philosophy is the most suitable for them to proceed to ensure choice and excellence and much wider effectiveness.

### Spread Education

"If education is our greatest and most infinite resource, it is the responsibility of us liberals- those who understand the basic tenets of freedom of choice and self-determination- to harness this resource and allow it to spread throughout the world, carefully differentiated by each individual whom it is passed on to."

**Mr. Robert Woodthorpe Brown**



### Why Liberalism Offers the Best Answers to the Education Dilemma

- (1) liberalism avoids the lowest common denominator approach that countries competing cannot afford;
- (2) liberals believe that the state has to ensure equality of opportunity such that a commitment to basic services is absolute;
- (3) liberals move towards equality;
- (4) liberals built on the strengths of the existing system and universities and public schools making them more socially responsive and more concerned with quality education but they did not destroy them but instead encouraged replication which promoted choice and ensured excellence;
- (5) liberals ensured the right of the female to education and;
- (6) liberals established signs of social support system in a form of social engineering.

**Dr. Raiiva Wiiesinha**

Prof. Luz highlighted that there is no argument that liberalism leads to individual choice. The question became: how to make choice available. In addition, he noted the issue on what the role of the state is in providing education- "how little or how big is too much?"

### DISCUSSION

The chair, Prof. Luz summarized the discussion into the following themes:

#### 1. *Structure and the Provision of Education: The State or Non-State?*

- (a) *how to provide choice in a one-school option: is there a way that the parents or the community can add into the learning experience to introduce matters that can broaden what is otherwise provided*
- (b) *how to make choice deliberate given many options: what is critical is that parents can sift through the choices provided the information and evidence that can guide those decisions- who provides information is also critical*
- (c) *the affordability of choice*

Mr. Browne responded that it is important to distinguish rural (with limited number of students who have access to transportation) and urban population centers (where there are a number of choices). He discussed that in a demographic point of view, there may be wrong choices given such contexts and that we should try to spread people around more and not allow ghettos of any sort to form. He noted that choice is more important in secondary education. In addition, in the UK and elsewhere, elitism still remains in terms of choosing between academic and vocational education. He also reiterated the need for lifelong learning such that people should be encouraged financially and provided with facilities to carry on learning beyond the age of 18. He emphasized that provision of education is an investment of the people for the people.

Dr. Wijesinha on the other hand noted that choices could not be unlimited. Choice in rural areas could be created by allowing parents to have more say and giving more responsibility to headmasters. He cited that the centralization of



teacher recruitment is really a problem. He suggested that there should be a more sane method of recruitment like recruiting on the basis of schools. He also mentioned that there was a foolish notion of standardization of positive discrimination in Sri Lanka where there are very capable people who could not get into universities and less capable people from the rural areas have no alternatives. He noted that the state system failed to be flexible since it did not allow options that would suit particular communities. He highlighted the need to improve education by setting up centers of excellence of which the lack thereof prevented necessary attention to rural areas. Regarding the distinction between academic and vocational education, Dr. Wijesinha advocated for degree granting vocational schools by accumulation of credits depending on what you want and what you need for lifelong learning. He also suggested that they spread modalities as well as everything else in terms of choice.

Dr. Parth Shah, in response cited an example from India's context. In India, he noted that even in urban areas, many students travelled long distances to go to school, while in rural areas there are hub and spoke systems where there is a single school for a larger area covering a cluster or number of villages. There is also the phenomenon of private entrepreneurs bussing students to areas or hubs where there are schools catering to villages in a 15 km radius or more. He also advocated per student funding with the voucher system that could create competition and choice. He also suggested that a government school building could be rented by various competing groups by government or private school teachers and serve eventually as a common resource.

Another question was raised regarding how affordable choice would be especially in rural areas. The question revolved around how far access will be given to students and how to let them continue this kind of education. This is because if it is costly, the poor could not access it. He asked how this choice could be supported. He raised the issue of how to address the issue of affordability of choice of education. In response, Dr. Wijesinha noted that the failure to improve rural education led to a phenomenon of bright students leaving school early and motivated parents losing interest. He stressed that it is more important to develop a program of concerted development of at least a couple of schools per district. This should create a sense of responsibility and commitment to school development with parents as stakeholders in the school system. He also suggested that there be a development of a system of accountability to the parents in that school and not to the bureaucrats.

Dr. Parth Shah in turn asked about how to get international donor organizations supporting liberal approach in education in promoting choice and excellence. He pondered how foreign aid could be directly given to beneficiaries. In response, Mr. Browne noted that most donor organizations give aid to those who become accountable based on the results of projects from aid. Regarding the voucher system, Mr. Browne suggested that values of vouchers should depend on the need of the child or student as long as there is proper analysis of the potential outcome.

## *2. Content: Standards and Desired Learning Competencies*



- (a) *Being prescriptive: when the bureaucracy tends to be the provider, they tend to follow the one size fits all model- they get the minimum that everyone can share*
- (b) *how to deliver content: what you allow beyond the desired learning competencies*

The chair, Prof. Luz also raised an issue from the perspective of the Philippine education system that there were pockets of schools that are excellent where there is a good principal, a group of committed teachers and parents. This leads to another question of why could not this be system wide. He also raised the issue of how to replicate such environments and such success across the system and how prescriptive can the liberal tradition be in terms of trying to reform an education system.

In response, Mr. Browne noted that we should not be prescriptive but encourage excellence, find out where it is, why it occurred, put more resources at it if necessary and stress continuity by building up from excellent schools to other schools in their area. To this, Mr. Jillani argued that if the state is not to be prescriptive, does it mean we agree with madrasah education as an alternative and with the devolution of education? He asked why there is less emphasis on excellence. In response, Mr. Browne emphasized that it is not excellence in terms of a degree in Cambridge but excellence of outcome where a person is fulfilled and is able to contribute to society. The state, according to Mr. Browne, should set minimum standards but it should not be the central government to monitor and assess these standards. There should be a minimum curriculum set nationally but administered regionally and locally. He recommended that students be taught core subjects to cope with life as it is around them and to modern society.

Mr. Jillani raised another issue about how different our message is from that of the socialists. Dr. Wijesinha responded that the main difference is rights: liberals value the rights of the individual such that education is a necessity and it is a responsibility of the state to ensure that it is provided up to a point (a Millennium Development Goal) compared to socialism's destructive equality. He added that liberals would upgrade schools and in turn give children opportunity to obtain a higher education that they need for them to compete in the job market (but it would not be equalizing downward). He voiced the need to make much more efforts to promote rural excellence and to diversify the centers of excellence by ensuring that in every district there is one quality top school with a system promoting access to the less privileged to it. He stressed that liberals and socialists would both agree on the need to maximize their potentiality but liberals would do it while promoting the chances of the worst off and allowing the best off to continue and not bringing them down in pursuit of egalitarianism.

In addition, Mr. Mitra argued that it is a question of quality given the complete mismatch between supply and demand for education. He noted that the regulatory cost and transaction cost of the state prevents other kind of education to come in. He asked who will be paying if the per capita per student per year is high- tax payers or parents. He argued that "it is a complete bogey to





raise an issue on the cost of private education since private education is primarily costly." He reiterated that there is "a mismatch between supply and demand and mismatch between quality of education that is expected and quality of education that is delivered" which can be blamed on the colonial system of education. He noted that when India started reforms towards economic liberalization, Indian society itself changed. There was no longer a pressure to be admitted to premium education institutions catering to law, medicine or engineering. Opportunities have opened up that formal education could not provide like skills that their generation could not even imagine- from fashion design to creative writing to all esoteric skills to which children and youngsters are willing to take the plunge. He asked emphatically which education in a standardized form can provide that. He argued that when economic opportunities open up, parents and their children would opt to learn from an enormous diversity of completely unregulated education as with the example of the NIIT in India. The chair, Prof. Luz responded in turn that there should be a distinction between primary and higher education. He agreed that higher education could be less regulated but primary education needs some level of regulation- some level of state control or participation.

### *3. Civics: Curriculum Content that Shape Social Behaviour*

*(a) how to shape civic curriculum such that individual learns how to act on their own based on their rights rather than norms that prescribe and shape social behaviour*

Mr. Browne emphasized that in a liberal point of view, the teaching of civics in school is important for us because people should know about politics; they should know their rights and responsibilities; how their country works. Civic responsibility has always been a liberal principle, he noted.

### *4. Learning Environment: Balancing Curricular and Extracurricular Content*

*(a) an environment where children can learn to live with each other and have a childhood vs. an environment that is highly structured (issue of class size)*

*(b) a healthy mind and body*

Ms. Jaslyn Go (Singapore Democratic Party) shared Singapore's case in terms of the big responsibility of Singaporean citizens in terms of education wherein you need to have a connection to the ruling party and wherein you need to donate to the school for your child to be admitted in a good "branded" school where teachers really do not "teach". She also raised the fact that the rise of child suicide rates can be traced to the pressure that children face in school because of too much emphasis on the ability to compete and excel.

Mr. Newton Peiris (Liberal Party of Sri Lanka) added that in Sri Lanka, children have become exam-oriented and that they have no time for extracurricular activities. Dr. Wijesinha responded that this is not really unique to Sri Lanka because all over the world there is much more intense competition



about useless things. What he suggested is to introduce fairly rigid rules and to look for strong leadership so that there would be a healthy approach to extracurricular activities. This could transform teaching styles to incorporate social skills, thinking skills, group skills as part of the curriculum, he added.

Mr. Browne responded that it is important to allow children to have a childhood because they are not learning machines: "children need to go back to regular compulsory sports to let them develop their bodies and not only their minds." The education system of today placed too much stress on testing or examinations, he noted. He again voiced the need for smaller class sizes so you could assess students regularly and help their development and make them develop in different directions if it is more appropriate for them. This would allow room for monitoring and in turn nursing them towards their education and making them competitive. He emphasized that we must invest on knowing the individual child. This would mean that class sizes of more than 15 to 25 should be abolished to get the most out of a child. He noted that: "This is because every child requires a degree of personal attention and because every child is different, has different capabilities and unless properly channelled, the child cannot benefit no matter how much money you throw at the expense of a child's education."

Mr. Dwight George Nayoan noted that in the US there is a belief that the ability of a child or student to receive knowledge and lessons is linked to the right nutrition in the public schools. He voiced the concern whether this is really necessary in a system of education. Mr. Browne responded by noting that in the UK, especially the Liberal Democrats believe that one should have a healthy mind and a healthy body. This can be done through sports and healthy, nutritious diet in schools which is indeed necessary and should be provided as part of the educational system. The chair, Prof. Luz also shared how the Philippines' school feeding program became an incentive for parents to keep their children in school. This was aside from the fact that there is a strong correlation between poor nutrition and school drop outs. Mr. Amit Kaushik also noted that in India, there was a mandatory mid-day hot cooked meal in government schools that included micronutrients and vitamin supplements which was probably the one meal that most children get for the whole day. This led to higher attendance and retention rates and surprisingly a softening of caste barriers because in school, children from different castes eat together on the same table.

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## CLOSING CEREMONIES

CALD Colombo Conference 2010 concluded with the closing ceremonies facilitated by Member of Parliament from Thailand and CALD Founding Secretary General Hon. Ong-Art Klampaiboon. Hon. Ong-Art then introduced Mr. Premasara Epasinghe, who delivered the closing keynote address in behalf of Hon. A.D. Susil Premajayantha Sri Lankan Minister of Education.

In the speech that Mr. Epasinghe delivered, Hon. Premajayantha noted the distinguished history of Liberal Party of Sri Lanka not only as a political party but also



as a source of ideas. He expressed his gratitude to the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for organizing a timely and appropriate conference.

### Individual Initiatives and Liberalism

"Encourage individual initiatives like many examples of educational entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka which must be cherished and publicized to provide groundwork for others to move forward on their own. Reconsider the role of the state in light of current needs and the best practices of the past highlighting how liberals of the past first became interventionists and later advocates of a minimal state. This is why liberals are not generally successful as politicians. Liberalism is a constantly developing creed. There is a need to fruitfully rethink some of the dogmas that have held back their bright students and work with greater care to promote excellence for all."

**Hon. A.D. Susil Premajayantha**

Aside from recognizing the achievements of Sri Lanka and the present administration of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in the education sector, he also recognized their shortcomings. He stressed the need to provide facilities for students qualified for higher study and developing systems that allow public-private initiatives that will help fulfil these goals. He also voiced the need to affirm the value of all education and training and not continue with the ivory tower conception of higher education in which degrees are restricted only to theoretical disciplines. He

emphasized the need for advanced

technology and practical action to ensure better training that is properly recognized in fields essential for economic and infrastructural development. He also recognized the need to give importance to soft skills in all training programmes including skills in communication, in appreciating and responding to other points of view, in solving problems and in making decisions.

The President of the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Swarna Amaratunga then expressed her gratitude to all the delegates of the member-parties of the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats, the Friedrich Naumann Foundation as well as the civil society organizations (Liberty Institute, Center for Civil Society and Pratham Education) from India for participating in the conference. In closing, she shared a short anecdote on how the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka was founded by Dr. Chanaka Amaratunga.

Mr. Siegfried Herzog, the Resident Representative of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation-Philippines, then congratulated CALD and the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka for holding a successful and enlightening conference on choice and excellence and education. He also noted how CALD's upgraded capabilities enabled others to access the conference online through live telecast. He noted how he and all of the participants had a chance to learn about diverse experiences, approaches and policies on education that is a crucial element of public policy. He noted that education is the key tool for social mobility and overcoming poverty. He also expressed how "joint learning is what CALD is all about." As liberals, Mr. Herzog stressed that we want to empower the individual and in education, to empower the child. The chief responsibility of educating and looking out for a child's welfare however lies with the parents, he noted. He expressed that the state can and should support the parents in this task and give them the means to educate their children and giving them the choice. The state however could not supplant the parents and



decide for them. He reminded everyone that we should respect the family as the core of society. On a personal note, he voiced his gratitude to CALD and the friendship that he gained from the past four years as resident representative in the Philippines. He also expressed his gratitude for the warm welcome from Sri Lanka and from South Asia where he will serve as regional director soon.

Dr. Rajiva Wijesinha, in reaction to the speech delivered by Mr. Epasinghe, shared how the Liberal Party became a political party from its beginnings as a think-tank. He then expressed his gratitude to the National Democracy Institute who came to participate in the conference. He also expressed pleasure in hosting the conference and interest in moving forward in the South Asian region. He stressed the importance of a state role to ensure education and to allow for choice in a practical sense. No one should be deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their potential because of their own lack of resources, he noted. "It is in the role of the state to step into this breach such that it is equally important to ensure that there is an element of choice." He noted that no one should be dragooned into whatever the state thinks is correct. He emphasized individual responsibility such that it is up to individuals to decide and thus the proliferation of choice is extremely important. He also expressed delight in the sharing of the different problems in the region regarding education which, by determining the commonalities, each country can hopefully help each other. In conclusion, he fervently hoped that everyone did have an exciting, interesting and productive time in the conference.

In closing, Hon. Ong Art, on behalf of all the participants, expressed his heartfelt gratitude to the Liberal Party of Sri Lanka, Friedrich Naumann Foundation and the Council of Asian Liberals and Democrats for organizing a conference on education.