

**Speech at the Skills and Technology Accelerating Rapid Transformation  
(START) Technology for Sustainable Development Programme**

**United Nations, New York**

**Wednesday 8 July 2015**

It is an honour to be here today to address the first in a series of discussions established by the United Nations Academic Impact entitled Skills and Technology Accelerating Rapid Transformation (START).

The idea of UN was conceived “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war”. But to achieve this ultimate goal we first need to save succeeding generations from the scourge of ignorance. Ignorance is the cause of all evils, be it wars and conflicts, inequality, poverty, or climate change.

What is so special about this series, about UNAI and its partnership with Amrita University, and the new portal that was unveiled this morning, is that it brings academia together to address the most difficult challenge mankind has to face – ignorance. Eradicating ignorance by bringing scientific enlightenment and technology can bridge the existing gaps and help achieve sustainable development for all.

As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations, your work today is a model of the ideals embodied in that document. The Charter calls upon all the peoples of the world to reaffirm “the dignity and worth of the human person” and to “promote the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”

The Charter’s principle of equality became more forcefully articulated three years later when the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It proclaims in the first sentence of its very first article that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

Of course, many of you know these documents and its history, but it is nonetheless important to reaffirm our belief in them, and that brings me back to today’s conference. UNAI, Amrita University and other partner academia, your commitment to the employment of technology to benefit all human beings is a bright example of the best ideals of the UN.

Science should be pursued for the benefit of mankind, rather than its destruction by war. This is a fundamental belief of the UN and your conference today helps advance this very ideal, as it imagines the widest possible benefits of science for the greatest range of people.

I am here today not only as a representative of a UN member state, my country Georgia, but also as the Chairperson of the Committee on Information. The COI is the body that reviews and provides guidance on the policies and activities of the UN Department of Public Information, of which United Nations Academic Impact is a part of.

As the UN matures we strive to be not just a body of nations, but an organisation that is guided by the people, for the people, as we work collectively to make our world a better place. In pursuit of this goal, over the last 70 years the UN has increased its commitment to reach out to all sectors of society, and the UNAI is a prime example of this engagement.

UNAI was founded in 2010 as an initiative of the Secretary General to be the United Nation's outreach to higher education and the academic community. In less than five years UNAI has enrolled more than 1000 universities in more than 130 countries. Amrita University is one of the members, and when they proposed a conference on science used for the benefit of societal and individual development, UNAI was delighted by the prospect of facilitating this important discussion and doing so here at UN headquarters. The partnership between UNAI and Amrita University is testimony to the power and possibilities of collaboration between the academia and the United Nations.

I'd like to take this opportunity to mention two other UNAI initiatives. On July 24th, 70 students from 42 countries will convene to speak at the General Assembly. These students are winners of the Many Languages One World competition, co-sponsored by ELS Educational Services and UNAI. The competition asked students to write essays about the post-2015 development agenda in an official United Nations language rather than their own.

Also, on June 26th, the exact day of the signing of the Charter, UNAI and its partner, the *UNHate* Foundation, co-hosted an event to announce the winners of the Diversity Contest. The task was for young adults to write proposals to end intolerance. There were ten winning proposals selected and each winning individual or group received

20,000 euros to carry out their proposals. We look forward to a world that is more multilingual and more tolerant as a result of these two UNAI projects.

I want to conclude by thanking Amrita University and its founder and chancellor Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma).

So often the secular or spiritual leaders among us neglect the needs of the most disadvantaged, but Amrita University and the chancellor are truly admirable counter-examples. You have dedicated yourselves to research on amazing technology, and you have devoted that technology to the betterment of the poor, women, and those in greatest need.

I want to quote Amma's words that she said few years ago, that still resonate strongly and is particularly opportune to recall them today at this conference: "We can no longer afford to see these two streams of knowledge [scientific knowledge and spiritual wisdom] as flowing in opposite directions. In truth, they complement one another. If we merge these streams, we will find that we are able to create a mighty river—a river whose waters can remove suffering and spread life to all of humanity."

You represent the best values of equality and dignity for which the UN strives for, and on behalf of my colleagues here at the UN, we are grateful that you all came here today to share with each other, and with us, such inspiring work.

We are delighted to have you serve as the opening of our series of conferences on technology or START. (we do love acronyms at the UN, as my good friend and colleague Ramu Damodaran said when opening today's conference).

Indeed it was a good start, and the ideas sounded today will definitely sprout into actions to achieve sustainable development, and help make a reality of what our predecessors articulated as they founded this institution 70 years ago.

Thank you.