

Sixth General Conference International Federation of Social Science Organizations

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Welcome Address by

Dr R. P. JAYEWARDENE,
Director General, NARESA

The Hon. Prime Minister, Prof. Chavdar Kiuranov, Prof. Dube, Dr Karunatilake, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is my pleasant duty this morning to welcome you all to the Sixth Conference of the International Federation of Social Science Organizations and we in Sri Lanka are very happy and honoured that Sri Lanka was selected as the venue for this Conference. The social sciences have an increasing importance in the affairs of society. Although we had not been familiar with the social sciences in our time in school and in the University, the social sciences have become more and more important in every aspect of human life. It is generally believed that the study of the social sciences, dates back to the late 18th or 19th century, but if one looks further back, its origins, like those of physical sciences, are in ancient Greece. The great philosophers of ancient Greece with their rational inquiry into the nature of man, the state, and morality, have been writing about the social sciences. The fundamentals of social science were laid by these philosophers foremost of whom were Plato and Aristotle.

After the Greek and Roman Empires collapsed, the dark ages in Europe almost closed any kind of study and research. The theologians in their monasteries continued their work and it is the Renaissance in Europe and the Age of Reason, together with the invention of printing that brought out this knowledge to educate the people. There was a great spurt in the study of physical sciences. The social sciences, although some progress was being made, found it difficult to break away from the scholasticism and the power of the Church. The Church was very particular that anything to do with man, his spirit or his soul conforms to the ideas that the Church maintained. The physical sciences were able to break away from this earlier. Although the early research workers were in the physical sciences, two were from the clergy. The work of Gregor Mendel and Cavendish are well known - people who had no scientific training but had learnt the philosophy of science from their clerical studies. At that time the universities were established first in Europe and then in England. The students and the scholars were mostly from the clergy. It was to break away from this hold of the clergy that the University of Cambridge was established, so that those who were not clerics would be able to get a university education. Among the social sciences the greatest progress was made by economics and we know that the first to write about economics was a clergyman, the famous Malthus, who wrote about population and food. Even today, economics holds a very prominent place in the group of social sciences and every year a Nobel Prize is awarded to an economist. The other branches of Social Sciences such as Sociology, Political Science, Social Anthropology, Social Geography, Social Psychiatry are catching up and the number of people who are now qualifying and researching in Social Science has increased enormously. As a result, instead of being confined to the academic sphere, social scientists are found in all walks of life: in the bureaucracy, in politics, in government, in institutions and in private consultancies. In fact,

there is a danger that social science is getting too close to the establishment. There is among some, the thought that this is a dangerous thing because they will lose their individuality and will become just part of a massive bureaucratic machine. This is very relevant to countries like ours, which are undergoing rapid changes and attempting accelerated development where social science, physical sciences, politics and the bureaucracy have all, in their own right, an important role to play.

Research in the social sciences takes place in all fields of social science. Although Economics has dominated the field, Sociology by itself has been advocated as 'the most important' and embraces all the other branches of social sciences. This may not be accepted by all social scientists but the movement in that direction is gaining some impetus. Recently it has been proposed that all the social sciences together be now termed the 'Behavioural Sciences'. Whether this term will survive over the years is still to be seen.

Research in the social sciences is following the methodology of the physical sciences. The physical sciences consist of Physics, Chemistry and Biology and their branches.

Starting from ancient times, Astronomy came first and then the development into the other physical sciences. The scientific method which scientists talk about is one of collecting, recording and codifying the data from this information to make theories and hypotheses and by using the experimental methods to try to prove these theories and hypotheses and so advance our scientific knowledge. The social science researchers are adopting a similar method now. So, we find that social sciences started in ancient Greece with the physical sciences as the classical philosophies having deviated into a different stream, now seem to come back again to the main stream by adopting the scientific method. In the sphere of medicine, it is very evident that field work in all its forms now seeks the advice, consultation and co-operation of the social scientists. In developing countries we should realize that social science research is important and that social science organizations should seriously consider what direction social science research should take—the creation of Social Science Councils which could have some suggestions to make and to direct research and formulate a national social science research policy. This is being thought of even where physical science research is concerned. we have been asked repeatedly, do you do any kind of goal oriented or directed research ? Do you fund any kind of research of this nature? We do not yet in this country have been able to do this. Science in our country remains very individualistic and the tendency that grew up during the 2nd world war to work in teams and teams to form net works has not yet been accepted by scientists of our country. It is very necessary that when the amount of money available for research work is limited, that this money should be spent in the correct way for the benefit of the people. If a policy of research is formulated by the government and the scientists together, it may be possible for the money being spent on both physical and social science research to produce research relevance. I hope that the delegates who attend this Conference might address their minds to this problem and direct us to help the social scientists to do research work and not to join the bureaucracy and deprive the research areas of very good minds who could do so much for the advancement of the social sciences and the progress of the country.