

Address by the **President - 2017/2018, Eng. (Prof.) Mrs. Niranjanie Ratnayake**

Engineer Jayavilal Meegoda, Outgoing President of IESL; Chief Guest, Hon. Patalie Champika Ranawaka, Minister of Megapolis and Western Development; Guest of Honour, Hon. (Dr.) Harsha De Silva, Deputy Minister of National Policies and Economic Affairs; Keynote Speaker, Prof. Tim Broyd, President, Institution of Civil Engineers, London; Members of the Head Table; Past Presidents; Members of the Council, Honoured delegates from the regional engineering institutions, from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, Distinguished Invitees; Fellow Engineers; Students from Universities and schools; Award winners, Teachers and Parents; Ladies and Gentlemen,

The gravity of the responsibility that I am assuming as the President of the Institution of Engineers just dawned on me as Engineer Jayavilal Meegoda, our outgoing President placed the heavy garland on my shoulders!

It is indeed a great honour and a rare privilege to be the President of The Institution of Engineers, Sri Lanka, the Premier Engineering Professional Body of Sri Lanka, which has been in uninterrupted existence for 111 years, currently having a membership of more than 20,000, which includes 5000 Chartered Engineers, residing and working all over Sri Lanka and in many other parts of the world too. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all our members for having the confidence in me by electing me to this prestigious position. I can assure you that I will do my utmost to live up to your expectations, to reach our common goals of uplifting the engineering profession in the country, be amongst the leading professional institutions in engineering and technology in the world, and contribute to the sustainable economic and social development of Sri Lanka.

On the day I am being elevated to the highest position in the engineering profession, I cannot forget the support and guidance given to me by my parents and family throughout. My late father, Andrew Kodikara, who gave the three of us, my older brother and sister and me 'unconditional love' in the true sense of the word, taught me to be humble, and face life's ups and downs with patience and tolerance.

It did not matter to him whether we came first in class or not, whether I did engineering or not - what mattered to him was that we are happy and satisfied. He shone the torch to light up the path in front of us, with 100% trust that we are choosing the right path. Now in hindsight, I wonder how it all happened. Of course my mother, who, by the

way celebrated her 100th birthday in August this year, was the person who led us in her subtle way, to the correct path, I think. Although she was not fortunate to have access to higher education like us, she made the maximum use of the education she had, to guide us in our small days in the right direction. My elder brother, Bandu Kodikara became a school teacher and an Educator and my elder sister, Sriyani became a Dental Surgeon, while I graduated as a Civil Engineer and took on the career of an academic. I owe a special debt of gratitude to my sister and my brother-in-law, Mr. W.K. Kumarasiri, a senior SLAS officer, who took on the responsibility of looking after my elderly mother, which allowed me to continue my professional career, particularly in the recent years.

The true Sinhala Buddhist culture at home and in the two schools I attended, Anula Vidyalaya, Nugegoda and Visakha Vidyalaya Bambalapitiya laid the foundation for my life as a Sri Lankan citizen, without prejudice, accepting and respecting the diversities among the people and keeping my head high as a professional in any part of the world.

I am so happy to see two of my favourite teachers from Visakha Vidyalaya in the audience today! My Pure Mathematics teacher Mrs. Sita Siriwardena, who in fact taught me mathematics in both years of GCE O. Levels, and graduated with us to teach Pure Mathematics in both years of GCE Advanced Level, as there was a gap created by the sudden change in the medium of instruction to Sinhala, and the Tamil teachers had to leave our school. I was one of the very few who had that good fortune! And our Physics teacher, Miss Marasinghe, who joined Visakha as a new recruit to the staff when we came to the Advanced Level, and exposed us to a whole new world of Physics. I still remember how you were struggling with teaching Physics in Sinhala medium initially, but by the time we reached the exam, we were so competent not only in theory but also in practicals, that we felt ready to take on any challenge! Thank you so much, Madam Siriwardena and Madam Marasinghe, for accepting my humble invitation to be here at this greatest moment in my life. I know I had to drag you from your teaching duties today, which I am sure must have taken a great effort on your part, knowing your dedication to teaching from those days, about 50 years ago.

Of course, my journey into engineering, which started with the choice of the mathematics stream at the Advanced Level, which by the way was a move away from the mainstream in a girls' school those days, was nurtured through the education I gained at the faculty of Engineering at Peradeniya, during the four years 1969 to 1973. I am indebted to each and every member of the academic and nonacademic staff at the Peradeniya E'fac, for moulding me into an engineer from the naive 17 year old school girl who entered the University.

Then in 1974, I joined the academic staff of Katubedda campus of University of Sri Lanka. Four others joined the staff of the faculty as Assistant Lecturers along with me, all of them graduates of Katubedda. One of them happened to be Lakshman Ratnayake, who later became my husband. He has been my guiding light throughout my career, giving a helping hand whenever I needed one, but letting me carry on at my own pace, while he progressed in his own career as an academic and an administrator. As most of you may be aware, he is a Past President of IESL, a Professor Emeritus of the Department of Civil Engineering at University of Moratuwa, and the Chairman and a senior Professor at the SLIIT. Our three children, Chamara, Dimuthu and Himali were present in the audience as school children, at the time Lakshman was inducted as President of IESL, exactly 15 years ago. Today, none of them was able to make it because all are overseas, pursuing their careers, Chamara as a doctor undergoing foreign training, Dimuthu as an IT professional turned Banker, and Himali pursuing higher studies in her chosen field of Biology.

Three new young people have joined our family since that time, Thathya and Gayani who are both Doctors, and Kajanka, a biologist. The latest addition to the family is our granddaughter, Layaana Anouk Ratnayake, who just completed two weeks yesterday.

I know my children did not get the benefit of a full time mother, as I had to divide my time among several roles, but I never heard any complaints from any one of them about my not being there for them. Thank you, Chamara, Dimuthu and Himali for tolerating my failures as a mother, if any, in good spirit. I have to be thankful to my husband Lakshman, and especially to my parents-in-law, my own parents and sister, and the domestic helpers I had right throughout, for being there to take my place whenever needed.

A little over two thirds of my life was spent at University of Moratuwa! From day one, when I met the President of the then Katubedda campus, none other than Past President Prof. K.K.Y.W Perera, Dean Engineering, Past President Prof. SAM Karunaratne, and Head of the Civil Engineering Department, Past President Prof. Dayantha S. Wijeyesekera, and incidentally my husband to be, Past President Prof. Lakshman Ratnayake, I guess my destiny must have been marked to be a President of IESL one day!

And of course then there is Past President Eng. Ms. Lanka Haturusinghe and her team of lady engineers, who have been motivating me and supporting me in all my activities

at the IESL. I am so proud to be following in your footsteps, Lanka, and I know that I can bank on the support of you and the lady engineers in all our activities.

All my professional development took place during my career at the University of Moratuwa. I am so grateful to all the Vice Chancellors, Deans and Heads of Department and my colleagues, nonacademic and administrative staff at University of Moratuwa who supported me, and most importantly my students who pushed me to develop my academic and professional career throughout.

We engineers have a very important role to play in the sustainable development of our country. It is our duty to reach the economic and social development goals that every Sri Lankan is dreaming about, and also steer the development in the correct path. In order to do that, IESL has the enormous responsibility of ensuring the standards of engineering education in the Higher Education sector and Professionalism among our members in the practice of engineering, which are on par with the international standards, while being locally relevant. I am a firm believer in the cliché ‘Think Globally –Act Locally’. We should keep our ears to the ground, (like the white ants), trying to be well informed about current trends and opinions in the world, but only adopt what is relevant to us as a nation.

My academic career spanning over 43 years and heavy involvement in IESL activities has given me an insight into the areas that need to be addressed in order to elevate the status of Sri Lankan Engineers. As the President of the IESL for the session 2017/2018, I will be focusing mainly on the following:

1. Preparing IESL for the implementation of the Engineering Council Act

The Engineering Council, Sri Lanka Act No. 4 of 2017, which was passed by the Parliament in February 2017 was published as a Supplement to Part II of the Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka of March 10, 2017, and is the law of the country now. IESL has a major role to play in the establishment and functions of the Council. We have been discussing the many impacts that the implementation of this Act is likely to have on the practice of engineering in the country and our membership. In the coming session, this will be my highest priority for action.

2. Development of Engineering Education up to international standards

Engineering Faculties get the best students from the mathematics stream, to be transformed into competent young engineers. Those who cannot get admission to the state Universities seek engineering education in non-state higher education institutes. Being a member of the Washington Accord, IESL is committed to the accreditation of engineering degrees that are of the required standard to be substantially equivalent to the internationally accepted norms for engineering education. We must encourage all state and non-state higher educational institutes conducting engineering programs to get IESL accreditation for their degree programs, so that the quality of engineering education can be assured. Under my leadership, IESL will take a proactive role in obtaining adequate resources and staff for the state Engineering Faculties to get Washington Accord accreditation.

3. Branding the C. Eng. as a Valuable qualification

Many graduate engineers do not see a value in becoming Chartered Engineers. Those in private sector value CIMA, MBA and MSc more, as these are the qualifications sought by private sector recruiters. I propose to conduct a campaign, addressing engineers, recruiters and general public on the value of the Chartered Engineer, while providing an enabling environment for the graduates to acquire the necessary competencies to obtain the Charter in all fields of engineering.

4. Engineers as Policy Makers

While engineers are the brainiest in the society, non-engineers dominate the national policy-making bodies. Engineers are often sidelined as 'technocrats' who are not suitable for dealing with the top level policy making, which is assumed to be the realm of those who have developed their right brains such as sociologists, lawyers, economists and the politicians. Unfortunately, except for a very few exceptions, we do see that we have not been able to disprove this stereotyping of engineers very well in the recent past. I propose to make an extra effort to empower our engineers with the skills needed to acquire and maintain these key positions.

5. Improved Service to all Stakeholders

Modernization of the IESL secretariat with new infrastructure and a better membership management system commenced under the leadership of the outgoing President, Eng. Jayavilal Meegoda. I will take an active role in establishing an efficient secretariat with the help of the Council. The two key areas that I will be focusing on will be quality and accountability.

I do hope that I will get the support of the whole Council and the blessings of the Past Presidents, fellows, members and all stakeholders to carry forward our beloved Institution and work together for the common good of our country and its people.

Thank you very much