

# PROPOSAL FOR *SCIENTIFIC HONORARY CONSULS*



2016

## **APPOINTMENT OF SCIENTIFIC HONORARY CONSULS**

### **Background**

Technological revolutions (waves) have provided a basis for economic development. UK, Europe and the USA advanced on the basis of the Industrial Revolution. South Korea and Taiwan caught the Electronics and ICT revolutions in the seventies and eighties. China, India and Cuba have caught the Bio- technology revolution. Accordingly while Sri Lanka's per capita GDP was USD 320 as against South Korea's USD 84 in the 1960s, in 2009 South Korea exceeded USD 20,000 ( being nearer USD 30,000) while we had attained only USD 2200.

South Korea invested 3.2% of its GDP in science and technology research and development while Sri Lanka only 0.13% of GDP. As a result South Korea obtained over 5000 US patents per year over the last 10 years while Sri Lanka obtained only 1.8 patents per year. This is reflected in the fact that only 0.9% of Sri Lanka's exports are high technology while Korea has 75%, Thailand 27% and Singapore and Malaysia exceed 50%. The greater high tech component in their exports has enabled the countries mentioned to emerge from poverty by capturing foreign markets and generating income. They have been able to transform their economies and become rich as high tech products generate higher profits.

### **Addressing the Problem**

As a response Sri Lanka is investing in Nanotechnology and has commenced development plans in other emerging technologies such as robotics and biotechnology. The Sri Lanka Institute of Nanotechnology (SLINTEC) that has been established in partnership with the private sector has already filed 13 patents in the US and 2 in Sri Lanka. Five of these patents have already been sold to industry for commercial development, and include a nanotech based slow release fertilizer which is undergoing field trials in Sri Lanka with Hayleys Agriculture in conjunction with the department of agriculture to facilitate domestic usage and commercialization ( see you tube ' Brief Introduction to SLINTEC').

There are also plans to address "colonial mould" economic problems such as the export of Sri Lanka's Ilmenite used by developed nations to make titanium dioxide. While Sri Lanka gains 2.8 million USD per year by exporting Ilmenite we spend 17 million USD per year on importing titanium dioxide for our paint industry. Nanotechnology can assist the process of developing an industry that would add many times to the value of raw ilmenite by producing titanium dioxide.

Ilmenite is just one of Sri Lanka's natural resources which include others such as graphite, dolomite, thorium, mica, quartz, feldspar and phosphate. The economic challenge therefore is not only to find means of developing and adding value to such resources but to develop an effective high technology export base in the country.

It is against this backdrop that the National Science Technology and Innovation strategy identified International Cooperation in Science and Technology and Innovation (STI) as one of its main objectives and a key enabler in harnessing STI for sustainable, rapid socio-economic development in Sri Lanka. Consequently as per cabinet approval, a dedicated Secretariat namely the Coordinating Secretariat for Science Technology and Innovation (COSTI) was established and has now been placed with the Ministry of Science Technology and Research.

### **Challenges with a Diplomatic Link**

Given the relatively low levels of scientific and technological know-how in the country, COSTI / The Ministry of Science Technology and Research believes it is crucial to develop modalities for international STI cooperation to obtain STI know-how to enhance Sri Lanka's development.

It would be understood from the above that it is important for Sri Lanka to have contact points overseas to facilitate scientific know-how, as well as develop synergies with science related businesses that may wish to invest in Sri Lanka and develop our scientific capacity. Countries such as India, Brazil, USA, China, Russia and several European countries have used diplomatic officials such as science counselors and attaches to address their interests. The unavailability of such a cadre in our foreign service leaves the alternative of having the embassy make contact with a suitable scientist to assist on an informal basis. However it is unlikely that employed professionals with time commitments will provide serious assistance without some kind of remuneration, recognition and or privileges. The ideal therefore would be for Sri Lanka to appoint Honorary Consuls for purposes of scientific facilitation as they enjoy diplomatic status and privileges, **but** Honorary Consuls are normally appointed on a regional basis. Accordingly the following is proposed.

### **A Solution**

Sri Lanka should seek to appoint scientists (involved in research in institutes/universities or in businesses) as Honorary Consuls to one regional center (or if the country is large to a few centers) in specified countries. It is likely that many of the specified countries which will include USA, Canada, Israel, South Korea, Japan and some in the EU and BRICS, will already have Consulate Generals and Honorary Consuls. However the appointment of the scientific Honorary Consul could be to a different regional centre in that country. These scientific Honorary consuls will naturally be required to effect other duties expected of consuls such as trade promotion, but their scientific background / expertise will add direct value in terms of introductions to research institutions, scientists, businesses interested scientific patents etc. Further although their specified responsibilities will refer to a particular region; it is unlikely that there would be anything to prevent them from making science related links to individuals and entities in other parts of their country.

For purposes of example Germany may have a Sri Lankan Embassy in Berlin, a Consulate General in Frankfurt and Honorary Consuls in Munich and Hamburg. Sri Lanka may therefore consider the appointment of a scientific Honorary Consul in a place such as Stuttgart, Essen, Cologne, Dortmund or Dusseldorf. In France it may be Lyon or Marseille. In the USA where there is an Embassy in Washington, a Permanent Mission to the UN in New York and a Consul General in Los Angeles, it may be Seattle, Houston or Chicago etc.

Given the nature of the challenge faced by Sri Lanka, COSTI is keen to see this proposal implemented as soon as possible.