

## **Conference of Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the African and the Gulf Countries**

**Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)** organized a one day Conference of Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the African Countries and the Gulf Countries on 27th Jan 2014 at India Habitat Centre. The Conference focused on potential areas for educational collaboration between IGNOU and countries of Africa and Gulf. Ambassadors and High Commissioners of more than 15 countries participated in this Conference.

In the inaugural session of the conference Prof M Aslam, Vice Chancellor, IGNOU stated that in the 21st Century, it is necessary for Universities to cooperate and collaborate with higher education institutions in overseas countries. He presented the national scenario and identified areas of possible collaboration between IGNOU and the African countries.

Sh Amit Khare, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development(MHRD) expressed his happiness at the organization of the conference, and called for collaboration between IGNOU and African countries through educational partnership which would be mutually beneficial. He said the focus should be on 4 Es of higher education: Expansion, Equity, Excellence of Quality and Employability.

Smt Tara Gandhi Bhattacharjee, Vice Chairperson of the Gandhi Smriti, graced the occasion as the Chairperson. Speaking on the occasion, she said that the teachings of Gandhiji and Nelson Mandela needed to be taken forward in letter and spirit. She said that non-violence needed to be a part of our daily lives. She said that Africa and India had a such heritage of handicrafts which needed to be protected through education.

This Conference was conducted by the Pan African e-Networking project which is supported by MEA, Govt of India along with Staff Training and Research Institute in Distance Education (STRIDE) of IGNOU, and International Division (ID) of IGNOU.

During the Conference, representatives from different African countries made lucid presentations. Following the deliberations, some of the areas that emerged included sharing of academic programmes, dealing with language teaching, ICT based programmes, skill Development programmes, professional programmes in medicine and health sciences and contextualized programmes according to needs of specific countries . Another major area was Training which included training of Training of Counselors, educational administrators, Training in Open and Distance Education for staff members, Mutual enrichment through exchange of faculty and students, and research and extension activities were also proposed as important areas for collaboration.

In the valedictory session, Professor Aslam, VC, IGNOU said that IGNOU in the light of the recommendations of the Conference would explore the possibilities of educational collaboration in African and Gulf Countries in the areas of teaching-learning , research, training focusing on open and distance education. He added that the conference has encouraged the University to take up the educational collaboration forward. He invited the representatives of the African countries to have bilateral meetings for interaction for future educational collaboration.

Shri Amit Khare, Joint Secretary, MHRD, said that the conference has helped in giving a true picture of the need for collaboration between the African countries and Indian universities in general and IGNOU in particular. He further added that the foreign universities can have collaboration with Indian universities; and no permission of the Ministry of Human Resource Development is needed after 2004 for the purpose. He said that the present programmes being offered under PAN-African project should be continued till the Government of India takes a decision on the setting up of the India Africa Virtual University. Professor CRK Murthy presented the Report of the Conference, and Professor PK Biswas expressed the gratitude on the occasion.