



The Professional

The Association of Professional Sri Lankans in the UK

10th Anniversary

UK Registered Charity No: 1145786

May 2015

President's Message

APSL having successfully completed one decade; enters its second decade at this AGM.

As I complete my 2 year tenure at the helm and hand over the reins, I would like to thank all the members for placing their trust in me. I would also like to thank my executive committee for all their support and co-operation, and wish my successor all the best!

It has been a labour of love and a pleasure at the same time, to lead such an esteemed association, united with a shared goal of promoting unity, professionalism and supporting development of Sri Lanka.

Over the years many Sri Lankan associations based on creed, language or political colour, have come and gone. But as an association open to all professions regardless on one's mother tongue, creed or political allegiance, APSL has managed to weather the turbulent times and go from strength to strength.

APSL has the unity, dignity, progress and wellbeing of all Sri Lankans at its heart.

Our vision is that of a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka where Sri Lankans around the world having realised their full potential with support from those gone before, in turn support the generation.

This is based on our belief that we are all children of one mother - Sri Lanka, and underneath the superficial differences we have more in common than we care or dare to admit.

APSL's mission is to foster unity and professionalism among the Sri Lankans in the UK and abroad, raise their profile and reputation and involve them in the development of the next generation.

We celebrated our 10th anniversary with a symposium addressed by a number of eminent Sri Lankans in their respective fields. Funds raised from the event were used to donate medical equipment for Anuradhapura Hospital Renal Unit for

the benefit of those affected by kidney disease.

In October last year we launched our Scholarship Scheme to mark our 10th Anniversary with the help of Prof Terence Fernando.

In January this year, we played an active part at the Tsunami memorial event organised by the Sri Lanka High Commission.

As part of our successful and long running series, we held an 'Ask the Young Professional' event in March. Funds raised from the Dinner Dance 2015 will be used to support the scholarship scheme. Therefore I appeal to you to be extra generous in supporting this worthy cause.

Mervyn Silva
President



APSL Scholarship Scheme

Help a gifted child today to make a difference!

APSL marked its 10th anniversary in 2014. During this period APSL has done much by way of relief, development and knowledge transfer activities within the UK and Sri Lanka.

To mark the 10th anniversary, APSL launched a scholarship scheme last October with the aim of creating something valuable and durable that would involve many people, both members and non-members alike!

Sri Lankans have a high regard for education and see it as a reliable way of overcoming poverty and achieving economic prosperity. That is part of the reason why Sri Lanka is able to punch above its weight for a small island, when it comes to academic achievement and world-class professionals.

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APSL Scholarship ... Contd from Page 1

Many Sri Lankan professionals in the UK owe their success to the good education they were privileged to have as children. While education has been free in Sri Lanka since the time of independence, it has increasingly become competitive and costly, putting good education beyond the reach of the poor.

The scholarship scheme was an idea of Prof. Terence Fernando from Salford University. He attributes his own success to the education and help that he received as a child. The saying 'For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required' has been going round in his mind for a while, which has translated into the scholarship scheme. 'Putting something' back was not altogether new to Terence, having raised funds for the past 25 years to support St Gemma's Hospice, Leeds through the Annual Windermere Row. The scholarship idea provides a practical expression to APSL's vision of 'a peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka, where children reach their full potential.

The scholarship scheme is targeted at academically gifted school children between the ages 9 to 17 who may be at the risk of dropping out of education due to poverty. However there is great deal of flexibility within the scheme to accommodate every donor, both members as well as non-members; individuals as well as corporates. You could give a one-off donation to the scholarship fund or make a regular contribution by standing order. Better still, you could sponsor one or more children for a year or until they complete their schooling.

Ten children are currently being supported by the scholarship scheme through Prof. Fernando's Joseph Aloysius bursary.

Obviously, funds are the oxygen that is needed to fuel this initiative, accelerate its growth and make it sustainable. In due course we also plan to open it up to 'contributions in kind' such as donations of books, computers as well as providing mentoring and career advice; as a way of increasing the breadth and depth and richness of the scheme, and accommodating more donors. But at present we need more donors and sponsors as poverty is the main barrier that is holding these children back.

During the AGM / Dinner Dance, you are going to hear more about the Scholarship scheme and will get the opportunity to ask questions as well as to get involved.

The APSL Scholarship Scheme provides you with the

opportunity to contribute to something noble and life-changing, by transforming a child's life, especially a child with real potential, who may otherwise never blossom being held back by poverty.

You could do that for the price of a weekly takeaway, or daily newspaper. You too could honour the memory of someone special, such as a parent or a teacher, as Prof. Fernando has done, by setting up a bursary in their name as a lasting legacy.



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APSL CHRONICLES

Past Presidents' corner

Q & A Session with Mr Mervyn Silva
President of APSL UK (2013-2015)



Q. Personal background

I started my career as a teacher in Sri Lanka having completed a degree in physics and mathematics. I was fascinated by computers and after coming to the UK in 1982, I studied computing and joined the IT industry. Having worked for the Local Government and private sector, I joined the NHS 15 years ago with the aim of contributing to its technology based modernisation programmes. I have my origins in the western province of Sri Lanka, where most of my family still live. I have lived in beautiful Yorkshire for the past 33 years. My hobbies include: travel, photography, keep fit, and DIY. Since 1984, I have taken part in the annual fund raising row on Lake Windermere, in aid of St Gemma's Hospice, Leeds. I completed the Alfred Wainwright's (197 mile) coast-to-coast walk with 4 friends in 2006, to raise funds to build houses for the Tsunami victims in Sri Lanka. Where possible, I try to 'leave a place or a situation better than I found it,' and regard it as my personal motto.

Q. Historical background in establishing/joining APSL UK

I settled in West Yorkshire due to family reasons as my wife originated from there. As most Asians living in this region come from Pakistan or India, I have been looking out for Sri Lankans, but didn't come across many. As this was the era before the internet, and news about Sri Lanka was hard to come by despite the ongoing war, I subscribed to the London based Sri Lankan newspaper 'News Lanka' by post as a way of keeping myself informed. It was through News Lanka that I heard about the launch of APSL in 2004. Although I kept meaning to join the APSL, the 200 mile distance to London acted as a barrier and I kept postponing. When the Tsunami struck Sri Lanka on Boxing Day in 2004, the barriers fell. Although there was news about the death and destruction and what the UK government and various charities were doing, there was no one I could work with to respond to the crisis. I contacted one of the office bearers to find out when the next meeting was and took the train to London. APSL was just 10 months old when I joined. I got a warm welcome, rolled up my sleeves and never looked back.

Q. Motivations (personal and group) for the initiative of APSL

What attracted me to the APSL and keeps me there are the members, the fellow Sri Lankans that I am proud to belong to. They are genuine, talented and generous people, who believe in what APSL stands for, and are there to make a difference to society. As a 'broad church' open to all professions, languages, regions and political affiliations APSL is tolerant and fair, rich in talent and diversity; much like the British society. We learn from each other, laugh together and complement each other's strengths. Together we have achieved a great deal, as an association and a charity. Among the many associations I have been involved with over the years, APSL holds a unique place as something special.

Q. Details on office as a past president of APSL UK

Since joining the Association in 2005, I have been active as a committee member. Starting shortly afterwards as the Deputy Secretary under Mr Rohan de Alwis, I took over from him as General Secretary during 2007 which I retained for 3 years. I was one of the Vice Presidents for a number of years, before I became the President in 2013. I had had the privilege of heading up the Association during its 10th anniversary celebrations as well as establishing a scholarship scheme to mark this special occasion. In keeping with APSL's cherished democratic tradition, I step down at this AGM to hand over the reins to my successor the next APSL President.

Q. Views on current APSL activities

During the past 10 years, APSL has engaged in a wide variety of activities aimed at:

Promoting unity, good will and professionalism among the Sri Lankans in the UK, Fostering good will, understanding and cultural relations within British society,

Delivering relief, development and knowledge transfer projects in Sri Lanka,

We have carried out activities in the UK, Sri Lanka, UAE and Maldives.

It is clear that we should try and hold more regional events to make APSL accessible to Sri Lankans who live in different parts of the country. Also we need to hold more events aimed at younger people to attract new members.

Q. *Views on the future of APSL*

A key strength of APSL is its openness to all Sri Lankans which has stood us in good stead through difficult times.

Where other associations have struggled or failed, APSL has survived with its reputation intact.

It was set up by a small group of like-minded people with noble intentions who have worked hard and brought it this far.

For its continuation and growth, APSL needs to:

- Focus on its unique features, build on and play to its strengths,
- Young people are the future, priority should be given to attract, retain, engage and develop young members as future leaders
- Further effort needs to be put into achieving greater financial security. The current treasurer has done a great job managing the organisation's finances. Income could be further improved through actively engaging members, retaining them through member benefits and ensuring membership fees are collected in time to fund the association's activities, events and marketing.
- More creative use of technology could be made to improve communication and engagement among members including better use of social media which costs so little.

Q. *Message to APSL members and non-members*

APSL by virtue of where it is and who its members are, is held in high esteem. In addition, it has done a great deal of good work in its 10 years of existence. As the association enters its second decade, we need to redouble our efforts to support its growth increase its reach, appeal and relevance to its potential members.

APSL has created one of the most effective ways for you to get involved in making a lasting difference to Sri Lanka through the Scholarship scheme.

As a nation that values education and people who have risen to high echelons in life through education, this provides you with an ideal opportunity to make a real difference to the lives of young children who could be our future leaders. Therefore I invite you to support this noble initiative.



APSL Young Professional Event 2015

As part of the APSL initiative for promoting knowledge transfer, a young professional event was held at the Sri Lankan High Commission in London on Friday, 20th March 2015.

This evening event was well attended by a mix of professional Sri Lankans, representing a range of expertise and experience.

Three successful young Sri Lankan professionals based in the UK delivered key-note speeches, on interesting and diverse topics, discussing their journey to success and aspects of their current work.

Dr. Rajika Perera, a senior scientist at a fast-growing start-up company in Cambridge, UK is a former student of Royal College, Sri Lanka and holds a PhD from the University of Cambridge. His talk titled 'En route to Kilimanjaro' was both a personal reflection of his journey and inspiring discussion of his work in exploring cancer cure.

Kanchana Ambagahawita, a Senior Economist at the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and a PhD student at the London School of Economics delivered a talk titled 'Be the change you wish to see'. She discussed the 'WorkInSriLanka' initiative, a volunteer-led brain gain initiative for Sri Lanka, of which she is the founding Chairperson.

Dr. Dilrini De Silva, a Computational Bio scientist at the University of Oxford in genomic epidemiology with a PhD from Queen Mary University talked about 'Genomic technologies in the clinical setting'. She also discussed her ideas and involvement in promoting career prospects among Sri Lankan school children.

A lively panel discussion and a Q&A session followed the three talks where the audience and speakers engaged in a dialogue about various emerging issues around developing professional careers, improving education in Sri Lanka and addressing social issues linked to education in Sri Lanka. The event concluded with an informal networking session over refreshments.





Celebration of APSL 10th Anniversary

APSL celebrated its 10th Anniversary with a Symposium followed by a Dinner Dance held at the Grange City Hotel, Tower Hill, London on 21st June 2014.

Celebrating the tenth anniversary in the United Kingdom for a Sri Lankan Association is a very significant event. Funds generated through this event were donated to a selected project for alleviating the Chronic Kidney Disease in Sri Lanka, based on a decision taken by the APSL executive committee.

Both events were well attended by the members, their families and well wishers.

Donation of medical equipment for Chronic Kidney Disease patient's management in Sri Lanka

APSL has handed over a stock of medical equipment including a multifunctional patient monitoring machine to the Anuradhapura Teaching Hospital recently. This donation was made possible by the funds raised during APSL 10th Anniversary event.

