Good morning……..!!

It is a great pleasure and an honor to address this august gathering.

Few weeks before, as I was going through the history and strategic planning of your esteemed University, what impressed me the most was how we are united by the similarities of our principles and philosophy.

Before I delve further into it, let me take an opportunity to tell you a story.

It is a story of a country, an institution and people like you and me.

Nepal, as most of you know, is a country of paradoxes. Nestled between the economic giants India and China, Nepal is still one of the poorest countries in the world. Although it is the second largest country in the world, after Brazil, in terms of hydropower capacity, the country is ironically going through a terrible energy crisis and suffers from power outage for an average of ten hours per day. Despite having probably the most diverse geo-climatic environment in such a small area, agricultural prospects are going downhill as the major working force of the country is abroad. Almost 2.2 million youths from Nepal are working abroad as migrant laborers. Almost half of the 400,000 youths that enter the labor force every year, leave the country. Remittance is currently one of the largest income sources of the country, with approximate 37% of GDP.

Last year around this time, after the dissolution of Constituent Assembly, The New York Times published an article entitled ‘Nepal, on the brink of collapse.’

Despite these gloomy statistics, if there is one word I have to define my country and the people, the word would be ‘RESILIENT’. I have countless examples to justify this but let me give you an example of our own institution to embody this.

Kathmandu University was founded more than two decades ago with a small team of individuals who were determined to change the higher educational scenario in the country. During these tumultuous two decades, during which Nepal went through a decade long civil war and probably the worst political uncertainty in modern history, Kathmandu University grew steadily and emerged as one of the leading educational institutions in the nation. Throughout the course of this development we have never let any excuse hinder our quest for excellence and have constantly tried to innovate in approaching local problems so that the solutions can have global significance.
After spending seventeen years of my youth in Austria, when I returned to my hometown in Nepal and decided to initiate a hospital, totally from scratch, with a simple mission of providing quality health care to the poor, I had little idea how far reaching and diverse our activities would be.

In the apparently straightforward and simple intent to improve health of the rural, economically deprived people in the nooks and cranny of Nepal, we have realized that what we had to practice was hardly taught to health professionals in any school.

The impoverished people living in shanty houses in hard-to-reach valleys and mountains have taught me the greatest lesson I have got till now and this is exactly what we want our educational system to understand too.

It is the lesson that the best solutions to the problems are identified in the places where the problems lie. Even in the most resource-limited settings we are working ways to harness local potential and collaborate with like-minded people to bring changes that transcend the villages and the countries.

Unrealistic as it may seem, we recently managed to declare a whole village of nearly thousand households in rural Nepal smoke-free by installing smoke-less stoves in every household. We are expanding this approach and are now moving to other villages. Where conventional approaches focused on charity and dependency, we have been working in identifying ways to help communities unleash their full potential.

This demanded knowledge and expertise beyond the domains of medicine and I believe, this is what we are proud of in our university.

We have tried to embrace the shifting paradigms in the field of modern educational system.

Let us reflect for a moment, what has been the major transformation in educational system around the world in the past few decades?

We think that, the boundaries between different disciplines have been fading and the demarcations between education, research, service and business are dissolving. Thus, in every educational endeavor we have been trying our best to encourage problem-based, research-oriented, interdisciplinary, collaborative, innovative and a more community oriented approaches.

I was very fortunate to experience the standards and perspectives of developed world as well as the dreams and hardships of the developing world. This helped me define the values of educational system. It didn’t take us long to realize that the best way to bring benefits from our expertise and experience is to teach that to others who will be able to improvise it further and spread it around. That was precisely the reason we started academic programs in our institution, so that we could develop new generation of leaders in our field who would be able to collaborate across the disciplines to do good to the people.
Then again came another realization.
One of the biggest challenges in the educational system was to ensure equity amongst those who get benefits from the opportunities. As in most of the world, it was the most well-off people who could afford the best education and thus those from lower socioeconomic strata were stuck in the vicious cycle of not getting opportunities.
The same applies to the institutions as well. Growths of the institutions get stagnant or even downward with the lack of adequate resources. Determined to change this vicious cycle we initiated multiple approaches to collaborate with the business and industry sector, institute local income generating strategies and using collaborations to leverage this quest for sustainability.

However, there is still a long way to go. It is this long road ahead of me, that motivates me every single day to walk faster and to walk together!!

You may find it interesting that every day I meet not only the topmost scholars of the country but also some common people who can not even spell the word ‘UNIVERSITY’, and believe me I learn no less from the latter too. Every day as I go through these meetings, what bothers me constantly in my head is the bitter realization about the gap between what we know and what we could have done.

Why is it that a simple concept like smokeless stove, used almost three centuries before in Europe is just being implemented in countries like Nepal?

Why is it that what John Snow concluded almost one and half centuries before is still a challenge to be implemented now for most of the world?

In a country like Nepal rich in hydropower, why are we still struggling with one of the worst power outages in the world?

Why is it that we are still living in scarcity where nature has given abundant?

Every time I get these thoughts across my mind, I get restless, I get impatient, I get angry and I get desperate ….and sometimes I wish if all of us can feel little bit of that restlessness, that impatience, that anger and that desperation, probably there will be a new realization. It is the realization that as scholars, as professionals, there is probably more we can do to make the world a little better place.

Let us ask ourselves, is there any way we can give little more of our expertise to the world that needs it more? Let us ask ourselves, is there any way we can work little further with the friends who will benefit with our support? Let us step out little bit beyond our yards, beyond our labs, beyond our classrooms, beyond our offices and seek partners for the projects we never dared to dream!!
We do not need to change the world all by ourselves. Let us just spark a fire that kindles thousands of other candles to dispel the darkness. Let us create a model of success. From our field of expertise, let us create a small model that we can show to the world and thousands others will follow. No endeavor is too small for this pursuit. No endeavor is too big for this pursuit.

Be it a tiny village where no child goes to bed hungry.
Be it a school where no teacher needs to struggle due to lack of internet.
Be it a small community forest where no leaf withers away without being used for drug development!!
Be it a rivulet where no drop of water goes in vain without generating electricity sufficient to light a small village up in the hills!!
Be it a town where no patient has to wait more than few minutes for an ambulance!!
…and the dream continues!!

I sincerely believe that nobody is more capable than the new generation to carry and fulfill this dream, the generation that has seen the world better than any previous generation, that knows about the world more than any generation before.
I am sure many of you must have had experiences in other countries. If not, I hope you will have soon.
One thing that always amazes me is wherever I go in the world, I find hardly any difference in the youths…youths like you.
In the streets in Dhulikhel you will meet people just like you, with the same fire in the heart, same zeal in the hands and same excitement in the mind. They are not short of ideas nor are they short of optimism.
I believe what they lack is the catalyzing spark to ignite their energy.
To me, that spark is to make this generation understand that there are vast resources within their reach, in front of them, which if they can harness will pave the road to success.
Let them hear the whimpers of barren fields crying for lush green dense forest.
Let them understand the sad songs of rivers that resonate constantly in our ears the lost opportunities of generating energy.

As a team leader of the institution dedicated to educate youths of the nation, this is what my dream is all about...to make them capable of understanding and utilizing the resources that they are living with.
To me, this is also the essence of any collaboration. It is by helping others to unleash their potential that we will be able to unleash our own potential.

So, whatever you call it: Global Health, Global Education, Global Partnership or Global University, to me, it means three things:
First Globalization in Education is a bridge. It is a bridge that connects those who are in need of the expertise and those who have the expertise.

Second, it is an approach. It is an approach that advocates for interdisciplinary collaborations that defies conventional roles of professionals from being that of experts only to those of leaders.

Third, I think it is a mindset. It is a mindset that even with given resources and available circumstances we have tremendous capacity to bring changes and touch the lives that are waiting for us.

Today, in this gathering of likeminded people like us, let us pledge to take our achievements one step further and establish a model of success that other institutions around the world would want to replicate. Let us leave a legacy that will inspire generations to come. Posterity will judge the greatness of the institutions not by what they discovered, but by how many lives they touched and changed. Come, let us walk this road together.

I have always been very fond of John Lennon’s song ‘Imagine’ but I have waited long for an opportunity to quote his lines. So, let me seize this opportunity today.

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one