Opening remarks of Hon'ble HRM Shri Kapil Sibal at the Conference of State Education Ministers held on 18th June, 2010 at New Delhi

I have great pleasure in welcoming you all to this Conference. We had met during the last meeting of CABE on 31st August, 2009 and thereafter I had been having separate meetings with the Ministers of different states discussing several areas of mutual interest in the education sector. During the last one year, together we have made tremendous progress in different sub-sectors of education. RTE Act has come into force from 1st April, 2010 and Article 21 A of the Constitution has become operative. For enhancing literacy, Saakshar Bharat scheme has been launched. At the secondary level, examination reforms have taken place at CBSE; in particular, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation, has been introduced. In the area of higher education, 4 new legislations have been introduced in the Parliament and a number of reform measures are underway.

2. Education being a concurrent subject, our federal structure demands continuous dialogue with States for the development of this sector and I feel that your support is of great importance. We meet during CABE and other occasions, but I thought this time, a day before CABE, we should have a face-to-face interaction to share our thoughts and come to an agreed plan of action.

3. In today's meeting, we will discuss the implementation issues relating to Saakshar Bharat, issues relating to teachers in the context of RTE, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, School Sanitation Programme, examination reforms and number of issues relating to higher education. In particular, establishment of National Education Finance Corporation, Revision of Pay Scales of Teachers, 374 Model Colleges, Skill Development through polytechnics, problem of large number of colleges affiliated to universities, are some of the important issues before us.

4. During today's conference, I would also urge all the State Ministers to consider the following five important proposals:-

(i) **Extension of CCE to the secondary stage**

The terminal examinations at the secondary stage in our country have added to the stress level of the young students. Every year, at the time of the examination and again at the time of declaration of the results, several news reports appear on suicide by students due to anticipated or actual poor performance in the exams. The parents are also under tremendous tension during the exam days and at the time of declaration of the results. To address this longstanding issue, we piloted the examination reforms in CBSE last year. Continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) was introduced in classes 9 and 10. From 2011, the terminal examination at class 10 level will be optional. The mark system has already been replaced by grade system starting from 2009 exam. This has reduced unhealthy comparison with other students. The initial results of the reform appear quite encouraging. The students and parents find CCE less stressful. Grading system has yielded better overall results, probably because students do better under less stressful situations. Under CCE system, more focus is given to development of the total capability of the students in both academic and non-academic fields.

I would urge state Governments to look at this encouraging impact on students of CBSE affiliated schools and take steps to introduce grading system and CCE in classes 9 and 10 under state boards. Since CCE is mandated at the elementary stage under RTE Act, it will be a logical extension to the secondary stage for continuity.

(ii) **Common Entrance Test**

Multiple entrance tests for various professional courses after the higher secondary stage, have further added to the stress and uncertainty among the young students. Coaching has become all pervasive. This has also resulted in severe inequity as the rural and poor children are at a disadvantage because of lack of

either affordability or access or a combination of both. Therefore I seek support of state Governments in evolving a consensus in giving a larger weightage to class 12 examination results for admission to higher educational institutions. Thus the subject matter knowledge can be assessed through their performance in class 12, whereas entrance tests should assess the aptitude of the individual students on the basis of specially designed tests applicable to particular type of courses. This will be similar to national entrance examinations conducted in several countries including SAT of USA. This single step will not only eliminate multiple entrance tests, but will also reduce the stress level of the children, who will also have a multitude of institutions to choose from.

(iii) **Integration of AIEEE and AIPMT**

At the Central level also, there are two different examinations- All India Engineering Entrance Examination for engineering courses and All India Pre-Medical Test for medical courses. Since subjects of physics and chemistry are common to both, we would like to make an effort to integrate these two exams into a single one having four papers, i.e. physics, chemistry, mathematics and biology, out of which the first three would be required for engineering, whereas the first two and the last one would be necessary for medical science. This would be advantageous to students who have not yet decided on which course to choose. We shall make attempt to achieve this integration by 2011. Similar efforts can be made at state level to reduce the stress of children by eliminating multiple examinations.

(iv) **Reforms of College Affiliation System:**

Many State universities have a large number of colleges affiliated with them. In some cases the number varies from 600 to 800 colleges. Some of the affiliated colleges are located at a distance of 150 kilometers or more. This system puts a heavy burden on the affiliating universities. I would urge all the State Education Ministers to urgently look into this issue. Meanwhile, I am also trying to persuade the Finance Ministry to agree to a scheme of incentivizing state universities. It would strengthen my hand if the states would avail of the scheme of establishing 374 colleges in educationally backward districts. The slow pace of utilization of the scheme of 374 colleges by states, has given rise to doubts about the incentivisation of state universities even if such a scheme was approved.

(v) **Establishment of National Education Finance Corporation (NEFC)**

A key factor in development of Education sector will be the availability of finance. I am happy to inform that a detailed Project Report on the establishment of National Education Finance Corporation (NEFC) has been prepared and is an important agenda item before us in today's meeting. Although the proposal is that Central Government can meet the equity requirement from higher education cess, we have left the scope for equity participation by states. I would urge you to consider participating in the equity so that the efforts in educational finance become truly national effort.

I am mentioning these issues so that we can deliberate upon them during the conference.

5. You are all aware, Saakshar Bharat has been launched as an over arching Literacy Mission aimed at rural areas with low literacy levels. Literacy is a key instrument for the emancipation and empowerment of women. Investments and efforts of the Government in areas of School education, health, nutrition, skill development and women's empowerment are impeded by persisting illiteracy, especially among women. I am confident that I will receive your personal support in this direction. Some of the common issues relating to all the States

include release of state share, setting up of Adult Education Centres and incentivisation of voluntary literacy educators. The state wise pending issues have been mentioned in pages 4-14 of the Agenda Notes.

6. The Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education Act 2009 has come into force which envisages significant reforms in the Elementary Education sector specially with reference to admission, attendance and completion of elementary education by all children in schools which conform to specified norms and standards. Apart from coordinating efforts, there are certain specific steps which the States could take. I would like to take this opportunity to urge the Education Ministers to create an enabling atmosphere for speedy implementation of this fundamental right. I would also urge the states to fill the vacant posts of teachers. It is estimated that presently there are 5.33 lakh teacher posts vacant under State quota and another 2.52 lakh of the SSA sanctioned posts, with large inter-state variations. Estimates prepared by NUEPA and MHRD show that implementation of the RTE Act would require the appointment of 5.08 lakh additional teachers across the country. State specific strategies will have to be evolved for training of untrained teachers, as also building additional capacities for preparing teachers.

7. The Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan is a flagship programme in Secondary Education and is meant to meet the surge in demand for secondary education as a result of successful implementation of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The objective of the scheme is to achieve an enrolment ratio of 75% for classes IX-X within 5 years by providing a secondary school within a reasonable distance of every habitation, to improve quality of education imparted at secondary level through making all secondary schools conform to prescribed norms, to remove gender, socio-economic and disability barriers, universal access to secondary level education by 2017, i.e. by the end of 12th Five Year Plan and universal retention by 2020. I would urge the State Governments who have not sent their Annual Plan of 2010-11 of RMSA to do so by end of June, 2010 positively. Further, School Management Development Committees have to be constituted as these have a direct role in monitoring the annual school grant, major and minor repair, strengthening of existing secondary schools and opening of new secondary schools.

State specific issues of some of the states like Maharashtra, Orissa and Himachal Pradesh are mentioned on page 35-36 of the Agenda Note.

As regards Scheme for Setting Up 6000 Model Schools, as of now 327 model schools in 11 States have been sanctioned and central share of Rs. 251.71 crore has been released. The State Governments of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Kerala, Manipur & Uttarakhand, which are yet to send proposals in respect of their educationally backward blocks (EBBs), are requested to submit such proposals by end of June, 2010.

8. As regards examination reforms at the higher secondary level, , it has been decided that there will be no Class X Board examination w.e.f. 2011 for students studying in CBSE's Senior Secondary Schools and who do not wish to move out of the CBSE system after Class X. The students studying in CBSE's Secondary Schools will, however, be required to appear in Board's external examination because they will be leaving the Secondary School after Class X. The Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation has been strengthened in all CBSE affiliated schools w.e.f. October, 2009 in Class IX. The new Grading System has been introduced at Secondary School Level (for Class IX and X) effective from 2009-10 academic session. During various meetings with stakeholders, survey etc. the CBSE has received encouraging response.

9. We have established 16 new Central Universities in hitherto uncovered States (except Goa) including 2 in Jammu & Kashmir, All the 8 new IITs proposed have become operational in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Orissa, Punjab, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. One new IIM viz. Rajiv Gandhi Indian Institutes of Management, (RGIIM), Shillong has been established and its first academic session commenced from 2008-09. New IISERs at Mohali, Pune, Kolkata, Bhopal and Thiruvananthapuram have also started functioning from temporary premises. 2 new SPAs at Bhopal and Vijayawada have started functioning from the academic session 2008-09.

As regards operationalising 10 new NITs, we need to work together to remove the difficulties which have been mentioned state-wise on page 90-91 of the agenda note.

10. The Central Government has approved a Scheme to assist State Government to set up Model Degree Colleges in each of the 374 identified educationally backward districts. The Scheme will cater

to the needs of the students in educationally backward districts, and is designed for improving access, equity and inclusiveness. State Governments are requested to identify suitable locations for setting up of these Model Degree Colleges and make appropriate budget provision for their state share.

11. I am confident that if we are able to fully utilize surplus capacity in Educational Institutions, we shall be able to provide much relief to those students who are deprived of opportunities for higher education. Also, the Government is in the process of issuing guidelines for optimal utilization of infrastructure in educational institutions.

12. I would also like to make a mention of 4 new Legislative proposals initiated by the Government. The four Bills namely, a Bill to Prohibit and Punish Unfair Practices in Technical and Medical Educational Institutions and Universities, a Bill to provide for Mandatory Accreditation of all Higher Educational Institutions and to provide an institutional structure for the purpose; a Bill to Regulate the Entry and Operation of Foreign Educational Institutions in India, and a Bill to provide for the Establishment of Educational Tribunals to adjudicate on the entire gamut of disputes that arise in the higher educational sector have been be introduced in Parliament.

13. We also need to take a number of steps to bring in academic reforms in the Central and State Universities such as examination reforms including continuous internal assessment, introduction of credit-based courses, semester system, institutional mobility of students, credit accumulation and credit transfer, regular updating of curricula etc. Based on the recommendations of a Committee constituted by the Government to review the National Eligibility Test (NET) for its utility, effectiveness and continuation, directions have been issued by the Central Government to University Grants Commission on 12.11.2008 under Section 20(1) of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 that the UGC shall, for serving the national purpose of maintaining standards of higher education, frame appropriate regulations prescribing, among other things, that qualifying in NET/SLET shall generally be compulsory for all persons appointed to teaching positions of Lecturer/Assistant Professor in higher education. Relaxation can be given to those who acquire Ph.D from a University complying with the UGC regulations in regard to the process of registration, course work and evaluation process. Certain suggestions of UGC have also been circulated today in addition to the agenda notes.

14. A very basic pre-requisite for improvement of quality in education is to have adequate number of teachers who are well trained. The problems of inadequate number of teachers and deficiency in their training have been underlined time and again. I would urge State Education Ministers to take expeditious action to fill the vacant posts of teachers. I hope to see greater efforts from States and enhanced allocations in State budgets for recruitment and training of teachers and for improving the infrastructural facilities.

15. Government of India has approved a Centrally Sponsored Plan Scheme, National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). The objective of the scheme is to make best use of ICT with the purpose of identification and nurturing of talent and life long learning as well as extend the education facility to the larger sections of people. This Scheme has two major components ie. content generation and providing connectivity to Universities/Colleges/Institutions of Higher Learning throughout the country. State Governments are required to play an important role in ensuring the success of this Mission.

16. There is also a great need to develop the vocational sector by setting up new Polytechnics and strengthening of existing polytechnics. State wise report is provided on page 96-102 of the agenda note for the consideration and response of the Education Ministers.

17. In this conference, we would like meaningful discussions on all the agenda items and would like to give opportunity to everyone to contribute. I would request all of you to be brief and to the point. I may mention that some of the issues having wider policy implications like the Higher Education & Research Bill, National Vocational Curriculum Framework and Core Curriculum for Science and mathematics at the Secondary Stage are slated for discussion during the meeting of CABE. Thus, we will have an opportunity to discuss these issues tomorrow during the CABE.

18. We have a hard task ahead but one that can be, and must be achieved with determination and coordinated action. As we deliberate upon the serious issues that constitute the agenda of this Conference, it should be in the spirit of strengthening each others' hands. So, I urge the Hon'ble State Education Ministers, to extend wholehearted co-operation. With these words, I wish the proceedings all success and eagerly look forward to having a very fruitful deliberation.