



FEDERATION OF  
UNIVERSITY TEACHERS'  
ASSOCIATIONS  
Reg. No. 8151

# Federation of University Teachers' Associations

Department of Physics, The Open University of Sri Lanka, P. O. Box 21, Nawala,  
Nugegoda. Tel. 0094-11-2881451

**President:**

Dr. Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri  
University of Colombo  
Tel: 0718-016200  
[nrdewasiri@gmail.com](mailto:nrdewasiri@gmail.com)

**Secretary:**

Dr. Rohan Fernando  
The Open University of Sri Lanka  
Tel: 0773-265138  
[rohanfernandoousl@gmail.com](mailto:rohanfernandoousl@gmail.com)

**Treasurer:**

Dr. Pavithra Kailasapathy  
University of Colombo  
Tel: 0777-956743  
[pavithra.kailasapathy@gmail.com](mailto:pavithra.kailasapathy@gmail.com)

**Vice Presidents:**

Rev. Dambara Amila  
University of Sri Jayawardenapura T  
Tel: 0714-053689  
[dambaramilas@yahoo.com](mailto:dambaramilas@yahoo.com)

Dr. U. Anura Kumara  
University of Sri Jayawardenapura I  
0718-483000  
[uthumange@gmail.com](mailto:uthumange@gmail.com)

Dr. Upul Abeyratne  
University of Ruhuna  
Tel: 0715-359423  
[upul@econ.ruh.ac.lk](mailto:upul@econ.ruh.ac.lk)

Dr. T. Jayasingam  
Eastern University of Sri Lanka  
Tel: 0773-059927  
[tjayasingam@gmail.com](mailto:tjayasingam@gmail.com)

Dr. Rangika Halwathura  
University of Moratuwa  
Tel: 0777-704826  
[rangikauh@gmail.com](mailto:rangikauh@gmail.com)

**Asst. Secretaries:**

Dr. Harini Amarasuriya  
The Open University of Sri Lanka  
Tel: 0777-880737  
[amarasuriyaharini9@gmail.com](mailto:amarasuriyaharini9@gmail.com)

Dr. Danesh Karunanayake  
University of Peradeniya  
Tel: 0773-602437  
[daneshkask@gmail.com](mailto:daneshkask@gmail.com)

Mr. Chandraguptha  
Thenuwara  
University of Visual and  
Performing Arts  
Tel: 0777-350228  
[chandraguptha.thenuwara@gmail.com](mailto:chandraguptha.thenuwara@gmail.com)

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**FUTA Statement on closure of universities for CHOGM**

In a move that definitively indicates that the regime has lost all sense of proportion, sense and logic in the whirlwind of CHOGM-mania, yesterday the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced a vacation for universities from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of November. UGC Chair Prof Kshanika Hiriburegama was reported by the media as having explained the vacation being declared due to numerous requests from undergraduates participating in CHOGM activities who did not want their academic activities to be disrupted. According to another media source, Prof Hiriburegama reportedly granted the vacation so that university students could 'study' about CHOGM.

Of course, the responsiveness of Prof Hiriburegama to student requests is commendable and we sincerely hope that this is an indication of a different approach to how the UGC responds to student requests in the future as well. In the past, student requests, in our opinion for more urgent matters such as student rights, political interference in university governance and problems with student facilities have met with complete silence or outright aggression. In fact, recently, the Minister for Higher Education, Mr S.B. Dissanayake's response to university students who protested against the establishment of a British private university under controversial circumstances, was to call university students "buffaloes" and to go on to insult female university students in extremely vulgar and sexist terms.

We wonder how many other Commonwealth countries disrupted their educational establishments in order to host a Commonwealth meeting in this manner. We also wonder how many other Commonwealth countries would tolerate such behaviour from their Ministers. We are sure the Commonwealth has taken note of all these factors when they decided to hold the CHOGM in Sri Lanka and allow Sri Lanka to Chair the Commonwealth for the next two years. The Commonwealth Secretariat has made several public statements recently on the importance of "collectively shared values and principles" and we wonder whether the actions of the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka and the UGC are part of those "collectively shared values and principles".

We are extremely displeased with the arbitrary decision of the UGC to announce a 'vacation' for universities during the CHOGM. We are not at all convinced by the reasons provided by the UGC Chair for this sudden decision. There is no justification for disrupting the academic activities of several thousand students in this way. In fact, we believe this arbitrary decision was taken due to the insecurity and fear of those in authority generated by their sustained failure to address the needs of university students in this country. This is part of the general programme of deception that has been launched by this regime to use the CHOGM to whitewash its sins at considerable cost and inconvenience to its citizens.

  
Nirmal Ranjith Dewasiri  
President/FUTA