Welcome Remarks delivered by Dr B. Shadrach, Director, CEMCA, at Community Radio Awareness Workshop held on 30-31 October 2023 at Guwahati in Assam, India

On behalf of CEMCA and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, I extend a warm welcome to one and all.

Shri Senthil Rajan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, representing the Government to inaugurate the event and to deliver the inaugural address. We greatly look forward to your words of wisdom at this event. You have been a champion of broadcasting, both analog and digital, for over three decades, and your commitment and presence here is a motivator and of great importance to one and all here.

Thank you, Professor Rajendra Prasad Das, the Honourable Vice Chancellor of KKHSOU for accepting our invitation and being our Chief Guest to deliver the keynote. I formally welcome you to this event. I use this opportunity to commend the Campus/community radio run by your university in service to people around this locality is a testament to your motto of being a people's university. Thank you for opening the doors of your university for us to visit and to interact with your colleagues who manage the radio station. We look forward to visiting you tomorrow.

My very warm welcome to Dr Sreedher, international expert on radio and community media, who is going to be the main anchor of this event. Thank you Dr Sreedher for dedicating your life to the cause of communication and to offer a voice to the voiceless and be an ally to the marginalised. Right from your GoI days to the stellar work that you carried out in Anna University, IGNOU, CEMCA and numerous organisations, are now made available to the 400 and more CR stations. We are thankful to you for your presence.

I extend my warm welcome to our dear colleagues, Shri Amit Dwivedi and Shri Gauri Shankar Kesarwani for your partnership with CEMCA and for guiding this event at every step of the way. You have meticulously planned this event and have shepherded the entire community radio movement for quite a few years. I am thankful to you for your time and presence here.

I am pleased to also welcome our experts, Shri Mahipal Singh Rawat, Ms Debanjana Devbarman, Shri Pahal Man Rai, Ms Sangeeta Kakoty, Shri Bhaskar Bhuyan and Ms Swapnil Bhuyan, and others who would join the team.

Let me also thank at this point in time, Ms Monica Sharma, the main anchor of this programme. Ms Sharma needs no introduction. Everyone who is associated with the CR movement knows her. Thank you for making this possible, Monica!

I understand that some 26 districts in Assam, 12 in West Bengal, and seven each in Tripura and Mizoram are dark districts as far as community radio movement in India is concerned. This event is an attempt to remove some of those districts from the map of dark districts and make them districts that are lit by community radio. In other words, literally, to bring light to these districts through the medium of Community Radio. Let this workshop be instrumental in enlightening the people of those districts with the power of knowledge, opportunities, and skills for livelihoods, brought through the power of Community Media.

I wish to commend the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for their pro-active role in turning the nation into one that is powered by community media. The ministry is trying its best to empower people by giving them the power of handling a powerful media. This is phenomenal. Not only are they providing avenues for these awareness workshops that serve to encourage community-based organisations, educational institutions and non-governmental organisations to apply and obtain licenses to operate community radio stations, but are also offering an opportunity to build capacity and gain the know-how of CR stations. This is overwhelmingly commendable.

Community Radios in their truest sense is one that embraces the democratic principles of – by the people; for the people; and of the people. In other words, by the community, for the community and of the community. Known as the third model – after public broadcasting and private broadcasting, Community Radios serve their geographic communities with relevant local, contextualised, and appropriate knowledge pertaining to their daily needs. Community Radios also make two-way communication possible between the stations and the communities they serve. They become communicators, content creators and disseminators rather than being mere consumers/user/passive listeners of content. This is powerful and profound.

At the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia, known as CEMCA, an organisation I represent, we have embarked upon a research called, 'listener to learner', to mainly understand as to what it takes to convert a passive listener into an active, lifelong learner and, how this media can be instrumental as a learning tool for social gain, behavioural change and strengthening social assets.

These citizens' radios are prevalent in other countries too, such as Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Hungary, Japan, Jordan, the Philippines, Nepal, New Zealand, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Syria, Thailand, UK, US, etc. UNESCO has been a long-standing proponent of the concept, and CEMCA, since the time Dr Sreedher embarked on this journey.

Dear colleagues, by taking the first steps towards setting up of your own CR station, you are joining the global community that believes in the media of Community Radio, the community that believes in empowering people with timely knowledge, skills, learning opportunities. CR is seen as a tool for knowledge empowerment, for livelihood opportunities and for offering benefits to the community. I welcome you in this effort as you take the first and the right step. The innovation Mr Marconi commenced in 1895 must reach your districts and must connect your people with the rest of the world.

Again, my warm welcome greetings to each one present here!