Closing Remarks by Ambassador Preciosa S. Soliven
Secretary General, UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines

I congratulate the participants of the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on the Recognition of Qualifications in HIGHER EDUCATION Organizing Committee headed by UNESCO Bangkok, the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations (DEEEWR) and the local host the Commission on Higher Education for pursuing the development of a system, process and strategy to recognize qualifications in higher education despite the region’s diversity of size, income, cultures, and education systems.

Many of you come from the Ministries of Education who adopt varied higher education systems, responding to realities of a changing world, have likewise evolved a diversity of responses, innovations, mechanisms, programs, mechanisms, and institutions.

I admire how each one exchange thoughts, experiences, insights, and lessons of the Asia-Pacific with the other regions of the world, and I am happy that we to learn and benefit from their experience; enough to actively forge renewed global vision for higher education that is transparent, quality-based and relevant to the needs of the the region and the world.

The workshop revealed that there are range of ways in which HE is responding to a changing world: For some countries, higher education orientation and emphasis is entirely on the economic/employment provision role of HE, rather than on the development of other aspects of society. That is why the recognition of qualifications is deemed important and urgent.

The UNESCO frameworks and models to pursue the recognition aspect is the way to go: These include the presence of a national qualifications framework, the presence of a transparent information system, an evaluation tool such as the diploma supplement and the spirit of cooperation and understanding. Each process and framework will be unique considering the country specifics. There is no “one-size-fits-all” formulae or metrics hence this regional meeting aimed to determine the bridge for knowledge creation and sharing and the way forward.
You have learned the new trends within the systems as universities react to the global changes. Issues such as the problems brought by massive expansion due to ever increasing social demand partly brought about by population growth, the democratization of secondary education and the growing affluence in the region were realities addressed.

My friends, there are still challenges. The challenge of expanded student enrolments, participation rates, number and types of higher education institutions and the experiences of Australia, Japan and South Korea that are experiencing population decline due to low fertility rates resulting in excess supply of places in the universities are realities we face.

Every country faced the issue of managing the expansion of higher education system while preserving equity, raising quality and controlling cost. Every country has a budget to balance, standards to maintain, faculties to satisfy and social demand to meet. Every country is challenged by the advancement of technology and the need to harness the power of ICT in delivering and improving the quality of higher education.

Although the patterns of student mobility are changing due to some issues on health, migration and economic downturns, I believe that there will still be an increasingly demand for quality assurance arrangements, the need for constant upgrading due to fast changing work force demands, and, in some specific instances, due to the rapid decline in population of the post-secondary cohort, causing excess capacity.

I join you in your success in the two-day conference. I invite you to enjoy the City and feel the Filipino hospitality.

Finally, I call upon UNESCO Bangkok to lead the advocacy in promoting mutual recognition of higher education degrees, diplomas and studies in higher education and our international partners and collaborators to sustain and intensify this effort. Countries in the region such as the Philippines support the above initiatives of higher education in the Asia Pacific region to contribute to a more dynamic, harmonious, and integrated global higher education.