Regional Meeting on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Regions

6-7 May 2009

Manila Hotel, Roxas Boulevard, Philippines

Opening Remarks

Dr. Gwang-jo KIM, Director UNESCO Bangkok

Your Excellency President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (if she is present)

OR Your Excellency Vice-President......

Ambassador Preciosa Soliven, Secretary General, UNESCO National Commission, Philippines

Dr. Emmanuel Angeles, Chairman, Commission of Higher Education, Philippines

Dr. Nona Ricafort, Chairperson of the Tenth Regional Committee Meeting

Distinguished guests

Invited participants

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and a warm welcome to the Regional Meeting on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Asia-Pacific Region. I am very pleased to see 40 international participants from over 25 countries and more than 100 local participants attending this regional meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations in Australia, AusAID, and the Commission of Higher Education in the Philippines for
collaborating with APEID, UNESCO Bangkok, in co-organizing and co-sponsoring this very important and timely meeting.

We live in a globalized world today. We see the flow of people, capital, goods, ideas, and not to mention flu virus, across national borders. We also see students, teachers, and professors leaving their homes to further their education and to pursue their academic career overseas. Globally, the mobility of students has increased fourfold since the mid-1970s. There were around 0.6 million foreign students in 1975. This number has risen to 2.9 million in 2006. This mobility of students alone accounted for more than 40 billion US$ in export income in 2004.

The growth of cross-border higher education has serious implications on students, academic staff, educational programmes and higher education institutions. We need to protect students against the risk of misinformation, low quality provision and qualifications of limited validity. We need to increase international validity and portability of qualifications by increasing their readability and transparency. We need to increase transparency and coherence of recognition of qualifications procedure. Higher education institutions need to know the equivalency of qualifications obtained from another country. Employers need to know the quality of qualifications of their employees regardless where they obtained their qualifications from.

UNESCO has been requested by the academic community to take a more proactive role in setting up an international framework for quality provision of cross-border education. The key role of UNESCO in cross-border higher education is focused mainly on standard-setting, capacity building and information sharing. With respect to standard-setting activities, UNESCO is initiating the revision of regional conventions on the recognition of academic qualifications in several regions to respond to new challenges of cross-border higher education. I am glad to inform you that the UNESCO Executive Board has approved the revision of the Africa Regional Convention and the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention last week. Later this morning, we shall hear more about what is done in other regions such as the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Convention in Europe. UNESCO in
collaboration with OECD has developed the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision of Cross-Border Higher Education which provides international guidelines and code of good practices to support an international framework for national policy developments.

As for capacity building, the task is to develop regional and national frameworks for quality assurance so as to help stakeholders in higher education to make informed decisions. In this respect, UNESCO Bangkok has collaborated with Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) to produce the UNESCO-APQN Toolkit for Regulating Cross-Border Education.

As for information sharing, UNESCO is developing information tools for students, building studying abroad data-base and publications, building a web-portal on recognized higher education institutions with the aim of promoting consumer protection. With the help of the Australian government, we have developed the Asia Pacific Academic Recognition Network web-portal named APARNET, to assist in the collection, dissemination and exchange of information relating to the recognition of academic qualifications and higher education systems within the Asia-Pacific region.

To continue our role, UNESCO Bangkok has organized this two-day Regional Meeting on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications for member states to discuss:

- regional initiatives for establishing common areas in higher education
- development of national qualification frameworks
- recognition tools such as diploma supplements
- quality assurance systems
- credit transfer systems and
- national information centres.
In conjunction with the Regional Meeting, UNESCO is also convening the Tenth Session of the Regional Committee on the third day to discuss the revision of the 1983 Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to a great education leader, Mr. Victor Ordonez, who passed away on Monday. Mr. Ordonez was the Under Secretary of Education in the Philippines and one of the former directors of UNESCO Bangkok. He had made vast and invaluable contributions to education not only in the Philippines but also in the international arena. If you have time, please check out his website and see for yourself.

I wish you all a very productive deliberation in the next couple of days in this charming Manila Hotel.