OPENING ADDRESS
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Commissioner, CHED and
Chairperson, 10th Regional Committee Meeting on the Recognition
of Degrees, Diplomas and Studies in Higher Education

1. Background

Madam President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, Director of UNESCO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific Dr. Gwang Jo-Kim, Philippine Commission on Higher Education Chairman Emmanuel Angeles, UNESCO Ambassador Preciosa Soliven, Fellow Commissioners at CHED and UNACOM, Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

The Philippine Organizing Committee headed by the Commission on Higher Education wishes first of all to express its particular appreciation to the UNESCO Bangkok, the Department of Education, Employment and Work Relations of Australia and the Ministries of Education, regional and national associations from all over the Asia Pacific region for actively participating in this Regional Workshop on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific held in the historic Manila Hotel.

This meeting represents the culmination of a period of several decades of intense activity on the part of the Regional Committee aimed at advancing the mobility of students, higher education faculty and personnel and the professionals in a rapidly changing world. Since the signing of the Recognition of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates in Higher Education in Asia Pacific Region in 1983 and the ratification of around 20 member countries, it has become apparent that a sustained response to the concerns of higher education mobility must move ever more decisively from aspiration to action, encouraging more countries to ratify and improve the systems and processed for recognition of qualifications.

As the Regional Workshop promotes "recognition of qualifications", it is indispensable that conditions for making what has been affirmed at
the regional level a reality in the everyday lives of students, higher education personnel and professionals all over the region. The system must be made clear, transparent and communicated to the education personnel, the stakeholders and the beneficiaries.

The last two decades have given us unprecedented challenges that have naturally arisen, especially as technology affected the way universities operate and function. Cross border education, transnational education, trade in services and other economic development agenda posed a variety of issues, threats and challenges on recognition of education and qualifications. We must all work together and put our individual and collective actions to these opportunities and challenges.

II. National Qualifications Framework

Many post-secondary students as well as young professionals face difficulties as they seek to pursue acceptance in foreign higher education institutions. This is attributed to the inadequacy of a national qualifications framework to assist the educational institutions and understanding of the educational systems in the region. This workshop rightly places a high priority on the process, procedures, systems to pursue equal opportunities and conditions of students and young professionals in the region. For so long as the Higher education institutions are well aware of the systems and procedures according to the criteria of transparency, efficiency, the efforts of mobility of academic and professional would be giving positive results.

III. National Information System

Improved information systems and processes are vital both academic mobility. This is one of the areas to be discussed in our workshop. The 2008 Australian Scoping Study has found that while there is a growing interest in, and demand for, recognition of higher education qualifications in the Asia-Pacific region, together with an understanding that regional cooperation, it is vital that a national information center will be established to facilitate the international mobility of students and workers. This area is relatively identified as
having slow progress - particularly in the area of generation of databank of students, higher education institutions and other information that will be useful for evaluation. The diploma supplement and the presence of a good and transparent communication about educational structures and systems, should not be too difficult to obtain if a National Information Center is established in every country.

This two-day workshop will exchange information on good models and key barriers to recognition. The development of national information system that can be addressed through official channels such as working groups and Conventions which can suggest action lines for increasing international transparency. Two crucial preconditions for effective recognition will be tackled in this regional meeting:

1. How to develop a reliable (official) information about education systems and qualifications which should be readily available; and
2. How to process and develop a timely and transparent pathway by which foreign qualifications can be recognised for educational and employment purposes.

IV. Collaboration, Networks and Strategic Partnerships

A number of agencies and organisations try to assist in promoting common space and regional cooperation activities that will lessen the barriers on the recognition issues. The SEAMEO, ASEM, APEC are helpful associations that play important roles pursuing collaborative activity which relate to professional and educational qualifications recognition in the region, including higher education institutions, professional bodies and quality assurance agencies.
V. Understanding the Bologna Process

The Regional Workshop convened today will also inform the delegates from all over the Asia Pacific region about the Bologna Declaration. We will be listen to the Bologna Process, which is a European Union’s way of introducing a system of academic degrees that are easy to read and compare, to promote the mobility of students, teachers and researchers, to ensure quality in education and to take into account the European dimension of higher education. This Declaration will be a benchmark at how we can promote quality assurance as well as qualifications recognition in the Region.

VI. Conclusions

Over the decade, UNESCO has safeguarded and promoted the mobility of higher education students and professionals, preserving the national laws that radiated throughout history, enriching the lives of successive generations. Looking back over the three decades of working on the ratification of the Recognition of Qualifications, which is now encouraging more countries to adopt and ratify, no one can fail to see that, countries in the Asia Pacific have made great strides forward.

The Philippines as the host country, would like to make a historic contributions to the revision of the Treaty to encourage more countries in the region to participate. We share the goal of everyone to have a better prospect for the entire human community to progress in wisdom, justice, and dignified living. I hope that this Regional Conference and Meeting, will help to build a region where every woman, man and child can live in mutual respect; understanding where academic mobility can flourish; a region where common system and framework are understood and considered.

I wish you a pleasant stay in Manila and Mabuhay kayong lahat!