Message from the Secretariat
At the 12th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education, 21-23 May 2013, Bangkok, Thailand

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Distinguished delegates of the Member States,
Observers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to Bangkok to attend the 12th Session of the Asia and Pacific Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education.

On behalf of the secretariat of the Regional Committee, I would like to congratulate the delegates from Australia, People’s Republic of China, Republic of Korea, and Republic of the Philippines on their being re-elected as Bureau members of the 12th Regional Committee. UNESCO Bangkok will continue to work closely with the Regional Committee and its bureau in moving forward with the revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention in the years to come.

The main objectives of the 12th session of the Regional Committee are to:

- Raise awareness of the national officers of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention and assist Member States in moving forward in the ratification process.
- Facilitate dialogue among Member States on the processes and challenges encountered in the ratification of the revised Asia-Pacific Regional Convention.
- Further review the draft “Toolkit for the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications” prepared by the Working Group, and if satisfactory, to approve it.
- Share good practices related to the recognition of foreign qualifications.

I would like to take this opportunity to share briefly with you some of the points and information that are related to the implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention:

Firstly, as you all know, Convention, Recommendation, and Declaration are the three main forms of standard setting instruments adopted by UNESCO. They reflect the common wishes of the international community on certain educational issues that are of critical importance to the Member States, and contain international norms, principles, and codes of best practices. So far, six Regional Conventions and one Recommendation on the recognition of qualifications in higher education have been adopted under the auspice of UNESCO, of which the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention is the latest one to have undergone the amendment process after nearly 30 years have passed since its inception 1983. In addition, a feasibility study report on a Global Convention was submitted to the most recent UNESCO executive board session some weeks ago and the result is quite encouraging, as Ms Paulina explained in the earlier session.
Secondly, quality assurance systems are ultimately the factor that can determine recognition arrangements and recognition outcomes of qualifications – both for domestic and cross-border purposes. They are the main source of mutual trust among Member States, and therefore will be the key to the successful implementation of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention. During tomorrow’s workshop, we will have a session dedicated to the discussion of National Qualification Framework. We may also need to touch upon Quality Assurance mechanisms at the institutional or even programme level, so that more comparable learning and teaching standards and benchmarks can be developed to help assess “substantial difference”. In the long run, a regional or sub-regional quality assurance framework can be necessary for the establishment of a more harmonised higher education area in which recognition of foreign qualifications and the mobility of students and professionals can be much easier and more efficient.

Thirdly, mutual trust should start with mutual understanding of each other’s systems. That’s why the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention continues to emphasise the importance of having a solid network of National Information Centres (NICs). Regular sessions of the Regional Committee can also provide member states with face-to-face opportunities for information sharing and collective knowledge building. At a more practical level, the development of a UNESCO Asia and Pacific Higher Education Qualification Statement (Diploma Supplement) can provide a unified template that enables the qualification statement to be more recognition-friendly in terms of transparency, reliability, and comparability of the information contained in the qualification statement.

Fourthly, we would like the implementation process of the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention to be a process of institutional reforms and capacity building for Member States, especially for countries that are still in the process of establishing their own quality assurance systems. There will be great opportunities for countries in this region to cooperate with each other on a bilateral or multilateral basis with the Asia-Pacific Regional convention serving as an important guiding document.

Last but not least, we would like to draw your attention to the inclusion of the recognition of partial study in the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention. It is very much related to the portability of academic credits across borders and can be arranged through the establishment of credit accumulation and transfer systems at national, institutional, and programme levels.

I am very much looking forward to your active involvement during the next three days of meetings. I wish you a nice stay in Bangkok.

Thank you very much for your attention.