Welcoming Remarks
At the 13th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific, 4-5 August 2014, Colombo, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Mr. Gwang-Jo Kim
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Your Excellency, Mr. S. B. Dissanayake, Honorable Minister of Higher Education of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,
Your Excellency, Mr. Nandimithra Ekanayake, Honorable Deputy Minister of Higher Education of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka,
Dr. Sunil Jayantha Nawatatne, Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka
Professor Kshanika Hirimburegama, Chairperson of the University Grants Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Distinguished Country Delegates,
Colleagues and Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ayubowan, Subha Udhāsanak and a very good morning to all of you!

On behalf of the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, I would like to express my gratitude and welcome to all of you, government delegates from twenty five Member States and the Holy See, resource persons, as well as higher education leaders from our host country of Sri Lanka, as we open the 13th Session of the Regional Committee on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in Asia and the Pacific.

I would like to thank the Sri Lankan Ministry of Higher Education and the Sri Lankan University Grants Commission for their generous offer to host this important event. UNESCO has benefited time and time again from the efficiency and professionalism of our local hosts in preparation for this meeting. With the support of the Sri Lankan government, this is the first time that the Regional Committee session has been organized in South Asia. We hope that countries in other sub-regions that haven’t so far had the opportunity to host the Regional Committee session will follow suit, so that the regional convention can be more beneficial and accessible to Member States throughout the region.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Government Department of Education for their sponsorship of this event, which enables us to engage Member States and mobilize intellectual expertise in Asia-Pacific and beyond.
Honorable Minister of Sri Lanka, we appreciate your government’s ongoing campaign to build an international hub of excellence in higher education by 2020. Engagement with other countries through the Regional Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications can help to achieve this target. Academic recognition that is based on regionally harmonized quality assurance mechanisms can empower Member States throughout Asia and the Pacific and help to ensure that courses are more comparable, compatible and recognized internationally.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the Regional Committee Session is the primary regional mechanism to monitor the implementation of the 1983 Regional Convention. As of today, 21 state parties have ratified the 1983 Regional Convention.

A Revised Regional Convention was adopted in 2011 in Tokyo, Japan, and is now open for signature and ratification by all Member States and the Holy See. I am pleased to inform you that Australia and China have completed the ratification process and deposited their instruments of ratification with UNESCO in July 2014. Countries throughout the region are in position to ratify the 2011 Revised Regional Convention, which is critically important as we need at least five state parties to put the Revised Regional Convention into effect.

The benefits of becoming a state party to the Revised Regional Convention are clear. Member States can use the Regional Convention as an updated reference document when developing bilateral or multilateral recognition agreements with other countries. More importantly, the process by which countries align themselves with the Regional Convention is in itself beneficial, fuelling capacity building and institutional reform in Member States, especially developing countries, in the region. UNESCO will continue to provide technical support to our Member States on their way towards the ratification and implementation of the 2011 Revised Regional Convention.

With the goal of ratification in view, the main objectives of the 13th Regional Committee Session are threefold:

1) Receive and examine the latest reports presented by the Member States (State Parties and non-State-Parties) concerning the progress and obstacles in the implementation of the 1983 Convention and the status of their readiness to ratify the 2011 Revised Convention;
2) Examine and approve the Guidelines for National Information Centres: A Reference for Asia-Pacific Practitioners, commissioned by the Regional Committee and developed by the Working Group;
3) Collect, discuss and approve new initiatives and recommendations from the State Parties and the Secretariat concerning the application of the 1983 Convention.
The 13th Regional Committee Session will be followed by a **Regional Workshop on Quality Assurance in Higher Education**. This is an attempt to push for a more **harmonized regional academic infrastructure**, including regional qualifications frameworks, subject-specific quality standards, and credit transfer and accumulation systems to support the implementation of the regional convention. Experts from within and outside the region, including from Europe, will share best policies and practices. Through our collective experience and input we aim to promote a common academic infrastructure in this region as a foundation for the future.

Last year, the UNESCO’s General Conference endorsed a work plan to develop a **Global Convention** on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. Just a few weeks ago, an Expert Meeting was organized at the UNESCO headquarters to discuss possible scenarios of the Global Convention. Given these developments, we would like to see more **trans-regional collaboration** on issues pertaining to academic recognition. I am pleased to see experts from Asia-Pacific and Europe here today who can help strengthen collaboration between the two regions.

**In closing**, I would like to thank our **dedicated resource persons**, many of whom have been working on regional convention-related issues for many years, including Tony Davies, Ethel Valenzuela, Dae-Joon Hwang, Sauwakon Ratanawijitrasin, and others. We will count on your continuous support in the implementation of the 2011 Regional Convention in the years to come.

Thank you once again for taking part in this important and timely event. I look forward to the valuable input and presentations. Together it is my hope that we can use mechanisms like this to rise together united in our strengths to face the increasing challenges during this period of enormous transformations in our region. I wish this meeting every success and for each of you to enjoy your stay in Colombo.

Thank you.

Bohoma Stutiyi!