Welcome Speech
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Tan Sri Datuk Haji Muhyiddin bin Haji Mohd Yassin, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia and Minister of Education
Yang Berhormat Datuk Mary Yap Kain Ching, Deputy Minister of Education I
Yang Berhormat P. Kamalanathan, Deputy Minister of Education II
Yang Berhormat Datuk Dr. Madinah binti Mohamad, Secretary General of Education I
Yang Berhormat Datuk Dr. Zaini bin Ujang, Secretary General of Education II
Yang Berhormat Datuk Dr. Khair bin Mohamad Yusof, Director General of Ministry of Education
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the 3rd UNESCO-APEID Meeting on Entrepreneurship Education.

I am delighted to be part of this important and interesting meeting. I hope we can learn from each other to improve our education systems. And in doing so, we can better prepare our young people to lead us further into the 21st century and beyond.

I come from a country where the most of our college graduates have two dream careers in mind. One is to work for the government and the other is to find a job in the chaebols or conglomerates such as Samsung or Hyundai. A job at Samsung, for example, promises high salaries and benefits. For the single person, it also increases his or her status as a good candidate for marriage.

According to the Federation of Korean Industries, it is an impossible dream for most young people in Korea. Why? Because the top 30 conglomerates employ only 6.8 percent of the total workforce.

The pressure is extremely intense from all sides. Indeed, young people looking for jobs face huge challenges under current economic conditions worldwide. In 2013, more than 70 million youth aged 15 to 24 years old are unemployed. This number is expected to increase over the next few years.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Strangely enough, because of this worrisome number, I find it extremely interesting to be living in Asia and the Pacific region. There has been a lot of talk about the region anchoring the global economy. Nevertheless, we are not blind to the many challenges ahead.

Statistics tell us that more than 900 million people in the region live just at the edge of extreme poverty on an income of between US$1.25-a-day and $2-a-day. The risk of a small shock or personal misfortune will push them into extreme poverty in the absence of a comprehensive protection plan.

While we recognize that the region’s transformation during the last 50 years, especially in Asia, has been unprecedented, the growth is not taking place at the same rate. We can understand the uneven development among the countries given the diversity of our region, in terms of size, culture, languages, population, socio-economic conditions, political systems and so on.

The latest Global Competitiveness Report, released by the World Economic Forum, has urged policymakers not to be complacent, but to press ahead with the reforms and critical investments to provide a prosperous environment and employment for their citizens. The report also says that the key to move forward is the ability to create new value-added products, processes, and business models through innovation.

In fact, the differentiation between countries should not be “developed” or “developing”. Instead, it should be whether they are “innovation rich” or “innovation poor”.

Indeed, policy makers and educators in Asia and the Pacific are looking for answers to be innovation rich, and in the process deal with the massive youth unemployment issue. I strongly believe that the answers lie in education in general, and entrepreneurship education in particular.

There is a growing perception that educational systems in many countries could better respond to the needs of labor markets, help economies to avoid skills gaps, and ensure that adequately trained human capital is available to support business activity as well as to develop innovative capacity and entrepreneurship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, before we go further, let me ask this very basic question: What is entrepreneurship?

Please allow me to share a few thoughts.

The super typhoon Haiyan that swept across the Pacific and devastated central Philippines last month once again showed us how vulnerable we are to the forces of nature. We continue to witness political and social unrest in many countries across the world. Debates about the impact of climate change persist, and concerns about the economy remain high on the national and international agenda. Needless to say, our thoughts are with the victims of these catastrophes.
Yet without fail, I am amazed and heartened by the resilience of people in finding solutions to deal with the stressful and challenging times and circumstances. And without fail, I reaffirm my belief in the resourcefulness of men and women who work together at immense costs to their own safety and well-being. Their creativity, ingenuity, courage and willingness to take risks are characteristics that underlined the essence of entrepreneurship.

The demand for creative and innovative people is as great today as it was since the beginning of life as we know it. While not everyone can be a genius like Einstein, every person has the potential to be a change agent, to make a difference no matter how small.

It is our responsibility as educators to help our students unleash their entrepreneurial potential to meet 21st century needs. To nurture entrepreneurship requires a rethinking of our education systems, pedagogies, curricula and other education services and activities.

At the same time, in the pursuit of economic success, we must never forget the need to educate the young and old alike to be responsible citizens in caring for those less fortunate and to ensure sustainable livelihoods for future generations. Therefore, social entrepreneurship and sustainable development are two themes that will have to be thoroughly embedded into entrepreneurship education.

UNESCO has convened several events on entrepreneurship education over the past two years to increase understanding and knowledge of entrepreneurship. UNESCO is very pleased to collaborate with the Ministry of Education in Malaysia to co-organize the 3rd UNESCO-APEID Meeting on Entrepreneurship Education. The support and generous contribution from the Ministry of Education have resulted in an overwhelming response to this meeting, demonstrating the huge interest in the topic.

The commitment of the Malaysian government in providing an enabling environment for entrepreneurship comes from the highest level. The Honourable Datuk Seri Mohammad Najib Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia, noted in his opening address at the 4th Global Entrepreneurship Summit in October this year, that it is important to set the right conditions for entrepreneurship to flourish wherever the spark may be found. His Excellency highlighted many initiatives to enhance entrepreneurship, including the establishment of a Malaysian Global Innovation and Creative Centre, or MaGIC in short, as a one-stop shop for entrepreneurs.

This is an excellent example for my country the Republic of Korea to look into. We need to find alternatives for the 93 percent of the workforce whose dream of working for the chaebols will not come true. A series of systemic reviews of educational frameworks at the national level will be necessary in many countries, regardless whether they are at the developed or developing stages. I recognize that there are many issues and challenges to be addressed. But I am convinced that through our discussions, we will be able to come up with some concrete outcomes and action plans to take us forward. There are already positive indications that policies and measures are shifting in the right direction, and I believe the journey for entrepreneurship education in our region is beginning to take shape.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on that note, I wish us all a very successful meeting.

Thank you.