Regional CLC Conference
Chiangmai, Thailand
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OPENING REMARKS

Distinguished guests…

• Mr. Suriya Prasatbandit, Governor of Chiang Mai

• Mr. Karoon Sakulpradit, Secretary-General, Office of Non-formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education, Thailand

• Dr. Wartanto, Director of Community Education Development, Ministry of Education and Culture, Indonesia

• Dr. Suthasri Wongsamarn, Permanent Secretary for Education, Ministry of Education, Thailand

• Dr. Younghwa Kee, President of National Institute for Lifelong Education, Republic of Korea
Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning and welcome to the Regional Community Learning Centre Conference in Chiangmai, Thailand, where we meet under the theme of the Role of CLC for Intergenerational Learning Focusing on the Elderly.

Thank you to the Office of Non-Formal and Informal Education or ONIE, Ministry of Education, Thailand, for co-organizing this event with UNESCO Bangkok.

I’m pleased to learn that there are more than 150 representatives from ASEAN countries plus China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, participating in this conference.

We’ve gathered here to address a very important trend – the ageing society – a trend that can be seen across the world. A trend that has implications on the socio-economic system and the economic growth of a country.

In the next 50 years, it is estimated that more than 64 countries in the world will be considered “ageing societies” – those in which about 7% of the population is over 65 years old. Data tell us that this is happening because of declining birth rates and improvements in life expectancy thanks to advances in medicine and healthcare.

While this occurrence is present in high-income countries, population ageing is occurring at a rapid rate in Asia, and it is this region that will have the greatest future impact. That said, it can be said that some countries in Asia will find themselves with a relatively old population while still in a fairly low level of economic development. The so-called
demographic dividend is coming to an end across the region, albeit at different speeds in different countries.

By 2050, almost two-thirds of the world’s older persons, aged 60 years and above, or 1.26 billion people, will live in the Asia-Pacific region. This shift in age structure will lead to populations with few children, not many workers, and many elderly people.

The ageing population phenomenon brings with it, new needs and challenges. In response, governments will need to develop or adjust policies and programmes accordingly.

What role does the international education community play in this context? How should governments respond to the educational needs of an ageing society?

Consider Japan, the Republic of Korea and China, where population ageing are most pronounced. In response, these countries have already begun to actively reform their social institutions in response to this demographic shift. Japan for example offers networking services and group activities for the older generation.

In ensuring lifelong learning for all, community learning centres or CLCs have an important role to play. CLCs are educational institutions set up and managed by locals with the aim to empower individuals and strengthen communities, in particular the disadvantaged, out-of-school
children, women, youth, and the elderly. Luckily, in Asia-Pacific, there are more than 170,000 CLCs.

CLCs are platforms that enable the elderly to acquire new and sharpen current skills to be able to continuously participate and engage in society. Increased efforts must be made to ensure that CLCs give ample attention to lifelong learning and intergenerational learning. CLCs also contribute to changing social attitudes toward senior citizens.

Let us take this opportunity to exchange best practices and learn from one another, with a view towards the expansion of these centers in light of this ageing population phenomenon.

Let us re-examine the role, the coverage and the inclusiveness of CLCs.

Let us connect and form networks in this area, to strengthen our partnerships and knowledge in this field.

Let’s work together, toward a way forward, to advance the role of elderly people within CLCs and to improve the role and responsibilities of CLCs in providing appropriate educational services and resources to this group.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Once again, welcome to the Regional Community Learning Centre Conference.
I look forward to working with you over the next five days as we discuss, share, connect, and make recommendations to improve CLC activities for the elderly.

Thank you.