

**Welcoming Remarks at Opening Ceremony at STOU, 17th
AAOU Annual Conference At SIAM City Hotel
12 November 2003**

**Honorable President of Sukothai Thammathirat
Open University,
Distinguished Guests,
Outstanding Key-note speakers,
Participants, and
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is my great pleasure, on behalf of Prof. Dr.
Zhou Nan-Zhao, Coordinator of APEID Unit,
UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for
Education or UNESCO Bangkok and of my own,
a Programme Specialist in Higher Education of
APEID and a manager of ICT in Education Team
in UNESCO Bangkok, to welcome all of you here
to the 17th AAOU Annual Conference.**

**Over the past 16 years, AAOU has brought and
achieved remarkable success in the sense of
establishment of and strengthening the linkage
among the full and associate members in this
region through exchanging and sharing
prominent ideas, experiences and tangible
research findings, which has been affecting on
several aspects in this fields within and beyond
this region.**

Just I came here today, from 3- 7 November I organized for 5 days training workshop the ‘Training Workshop for Policy-Makers in Distance Education and Open Learning’ in Shanghai, P. R. China, in collaboration with UNESCO HQs and Shanghai Distance Education Group, gathering 14 participants from 14 different countries. The theme was the development and evaluation of regional knowledge base system for Open and Distance Learning initiated by UNESCO HQs. This is one of the key-projects in Higher Education Division of APEID, UNESCO Bangkok in cooperation with UNESCO HQs. In addition, the participants in the training workshop had an opportunity to participate as observers in the MEGA University Summit, also held in Shanghai on 6-7 November organized by UNESCO HQs, the theme of which was ‘Innovation and Collaboration – Joint Action for the Future of Distance Education,’ aiming at

- 1. To provide a forum for presidents or vice-chancellors of mega universities to exchange best practices, ideas and visions concerning formulation of innovative strategies in tapping the great potential of distance education, open learning and teaching on-line in the provision of life-long education and the development of a learning society, and**
- 2. To explore possibilities of new forms of**

international collaboration and networking among mega universities.

As we all know well that Asia and the Pacific is a vast region of over three billion people, containing almost 60 per cent of the world's population but only one third of the world's higher education enrolments, and only 28 per cent of the world's wealth. It is the largest of the UNESCO regions in terms of both geographic size and population, and includes two countries each with a population in excess of one billion people, as well as many small nation states. Countries of the region differ greatly in ethnicity, social characteristics and the extent of their recent economic development, with striking differences between rich and poor countries, and between rural and urban areas.

The diversity of the region is clearly reflected in its higher education systems. The region includes some of the largest higher education systems in the world but also micro-systems that cater for only small numbers of students. Some higher education systems are amongst the strongest and best resourced internationally, while others struggle to find sufficient resources even to provide the most basic elements of higher education provision.

In this context, we, Higher Education Division of APEID, UNESCO Bangkok, also started a pilot

project in the area of ICT, aiming at exploring the possibilities to establish a Greater Mekong Sub-regional Virtual University responding to the World Declaration for the 21st Century adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education or WCHE 1998. UNESCO will try to work closely with SEAMEO RIHED, STOU, six GMS countries and organize separate expert group meetings to develop pilot projects in three areas namely ICT, Mekong Studies and GMS Tourism, though we UNESCO will have the budget constraint in coming two years.

Aside from these activities, we UNESCO will try to strongly seek to support activities in line with ODL and its related issues such as;

- 1. Assisting in the 8th Session of the Regional Committee for Recognition of Studies, Diplomas, and Degrees,**
- 2. Assisting in the management and organization of Regional Workshop for Quality Assurance in Higher Education,**
- 3. Assisting in the Follow-up activities of 2003 Mega-University Summit,**
- 4. Assisting in encouraging the Partners' Meetings, the World Conference on Higher Education + 5, reasserted the crucial importance of research in promoting higher education development and in particular the need to develop research capacities in**

- Member States, and**
- 5. Carrying out the survey of the innovative and good practices of open and virtual universities focus on the utilization of local/regional wisdom in the courses to develop the database and to form the regional project team on the adaptation of the MIT open courseware (MIT OCWs).**

I understand that this present Annual Conference theme is 'Networking and Partnership for Strengthening Collaboration in Open and Distance Education.'

Under this theme, four sub-themes are designed;

- 1. Community and Industry-based ODL Programmes,**
 - (a) Consisting from Strengthening,**
 - (b) Sustainable development,**
 - (c) Improving quality of life, and**
 - (d) Student participation.**
- 2. Collaboration in the Digital Area,**
 - (a) E-learning,**
 - (b) Virtual University, and**
 - (c) Digital University.**
- 3. Collaboration in Media, methods, Assessment and Quality**
 - (a) Collaboration in media and methods,**
 - (b) Assessment and follow-up activities, and,**
 - (c) Quality assessment and networking,**

- 4. Policy, Strategy and Scope**
- (a) Networking and consortium,**
 - (b) UNITWIN/UNESCO chairs,**
 - (c) Regional and sub-regional collaboration,**
 - (d) HGlobal Learning Network, and**
 - (e) Scope, consisting from**
 - ① Cultural Heritage,**
 - ② Science and Technology**
 - ③ Humanities / Social Science, and**
 - ④ Economics and management.**

In this regard, I am expecting that at the end of the Conference, toward the key issues including Quality Assurance, Accreditation and Recognition of studies and diplomas, networking and partnership both in the sense of humane and electronic aspects are strengthened to collaborate in open and distance education.

Last but not least, I wish all of you enjoyed yourselves not only at this Conference but also in Bangkok.

Thank you for your attention.