

Welcome greeting by Caroline Benton, University of Tsukuba

Good morning every one and welcome.

1. As the representative from the University of Tsukuba I have the honor to account with so many distinguished guests in the University. I would like to thank you for coming all the way to Tsukuba but also to Japan for this event.
2. Yesterday for many of us [people attending the SEAMEO symposium] it was a day of intensive mutual learning and discovery during the symposium co-organized by the University of Tsukuba and SEAMEO RIHED to celebrate the launching of the AIMS (ASEAN International Mobility of Students) Programme in Japan.
3. Today we gather at the heart of the university, with a somewhat overlapping audience but with a different goal: promoting educational cooperation between Southeast Asia and Japan.
4. The University of Tsukuba, as an affiliated member of SEAMEO, is proud to have gathered all SEAMEO CENTERS' Directors and SEAMEO Secretariat for this Symposium organized under the name of *Bridging the ASEAN Community and Japan through Education*.
5. 2015 will be the kick off year of the ASEAN Community; governments in region are working towards the creation of a more integrated framework that goes beyond free trade agreements and the free flows of goods and services.
6. Within this context the Southeast Asian Ministries of Education Organization (SEAMEO) has taken a leading role in fostering the integration process through its contribution in education.
7. At the same time Japan is constantly looking for ways to further develop cooperative linkages with the region in order to promote friendship and sustainable development.

8. Within this context, University of Tsukuba, as an Affiliate Member of SEAMEO, represents a unique platform where existing relations can further consolidate; and it works as a strategic knot where innovative forms and areas of cooperation can be discovered and developed.
9. The university is a comprehensive research institution that accounts with some 11,000 undergraduate students and approximately 6,000 postgraduate students and researchers.
10. *Imagine the future* the University's motto closely relates to the vision that SEAMEO has of itself as an agent of change towards a more brilliant and prosperous future.
11. With this in mind and in the context of a knowledge-based society, this symposium has been conceived to:
  - a. create opportunities to bridge ASEAN and Japan and to deepen mutual understanding among SEAMEO Centers and educational institutions in the University and Japan as a whole.
  - b. Enhance sharing and networking among educators, education practitioners and researchers in Japan and Southeast Asia.
  - c. Promote the development of education and lifelong learning in the context of the ASEAN integration;
  - d. Share initiatives, experiences and challenges in response to various drivers of change and shifting trends in education in Southeast Asia and Japan;
  - e. Provide links between institutions in Japan and Southeast Asia for more effective and sustainable networking; and
  - f. Extend collaboration between SEAMEO Centers and CRICED to the whole University of Tsukuba and other institutions in Japan.

12. I would like then, to invite you to share your experiences, interests and goals, and to think of ways in which we can produce synergetic encounters as the outcome of this symposium.
13. Lastly I would like to express my most sincere gratefulness for coming all the way not only to Tsukuba but also to Japan. Very special thanks go to:
  - The representative of MEXT Japan, Director of Overseas Cooperation International Affairs Division Mr. Yoshiaki Sato
  - The Director of SEAMEO Secretariat Dr. Witaya Jeradechakul,
  - The Deputy Directors of SEAMEO Secretariat: Dr Tinsiri Siribodhi and Dr. Handoko
  - To all SEAMEO Centers' Directors, and
  - To Ms. Abigail Lanceta Cuales
  - The same gratitude goes to the representatives from universities and other educational institutions and to all participants.
14. I am certain this is a precious networking opportunity that should bear important fruits by creating synergy and complementation; as such I invite you to engage in the activities planned for the day and to participate actively.
15. Once more thank you very much and have a productive day!