



OPENING REMARKS

By

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*(Delivered at ASEM Lifelong Learning Conference:
Increasing Opportunities and Removing Obstacles to Lifelong Learning
Nha Trang, Vietnam, 29-30 October 2009)*

H.E. Dr. Nguyen Thi Nghia, *Deputy Minister of Education and Training of Vietnam;*

H.E. Dr. Nguyen Huu Dac, *Permanent Deputy Minister of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs of Vietnam;*

Dr. Arne Carlsen, *Chairman of the ASEM LLL Hub.*

Dear Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Introduction

1. It is my honour and privilege to represent the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) at the Opening of the ASEM Lifelong Learning Conference on the topic of “Increasing Opportunities and Removing Obstacles to Lifelong Learning”. Allow me, on this occasion, to extend ASEF’s warmest welcome and best wishes to all guests and participants of this very timely and important meeting.

The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** was established in February 1997 under the framework of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process. ASEF advances mutual understanding and collaboration between the people of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. www.asef.org

The **Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation. It brings together Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. www.aseminfoboard.org

2. It is indeed very timely that our Conference is being held soon after the successful conclusion of the 2nd ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education held in Hanoi in May 2009. At this conference, the Ministers reiterated their commitment to further strengthen co-operation in human resource development, capacity building and sustained dialogue and exchanges in education, vocational training and lifelong learning.
3. Your presence here today further emphasizes the importance of the lifelong learning agenda. I am confident that this conference will provide us a very good opportunity to discuss the strategies and best practices of how best to support lifelong learning initiatives, especially in the context of its growing prominence in the international policy discussions among ASEM governments as well as non-government stakeholders.

Emerging Role of the ASEM LLL Hub in the ASEM Education process

4. The ASEM Education and Research Hub for LLL (ASEM LLL Hub) were born out of an examination of possibilities for a stronger co-operation between Asia and Europe in the field of Lifelong Learning. It was submitted to the ASEM IV Summit (Copenhagen, 2002). The initiative was welcomed and accepted at the ASEM V Summit (Hanoi, 2004) and further reinforced at the ASEM VI (Helsinki, 2006).
5. With support from the Danish Government, the ASEM LLL Hub was officially launched at its first conference in Copenhagen 2005. Since then, the Hub has received support from government institutions, universities and ASEF.
6. In the Chair's Conclusion of the 1st ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education (Berlin, 2008), the ASEM LLL Hub was regarded as an innovative cooperation between Asia and Europe and invited to expand its activities to include all ASEM countries.



7. At the ASEM VII Summit in Beijing 2008, the ASEM LLL Hub presented its achievements in an exhibition. On this occasion, our leaders renewed their commitment to further strengthen their cooperation in human resource development and sustained dialogue, as well as exchanges in lifelong learning.
8. In May 2009 (Hanoi), the 2nd ASEM Conference of Ministers Responsible for Education acknowledged that Lifelong Learning provides a solid framework for sustainable human resource development, which generates economic growth, social welfare and enables individuals to pursue stimulating learning opportunities at all stages of their lives.

ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

9. The ASEM LLL Hub provides opportunities for collaboration between Asian and European countries on evidence-based based policy making through research. It has a permanent Advisory Board (composed of ASEM education and labour ministries). In addition, there are five (5) research networks under the LLL Hub undertaking research on e-Learning, workplace learning, professionalisation of LLL teachers, strategies for LLL and ASEM competences.
10. On an annual basis, the ASEM LLL Hub convenes representatives of the member-universities of the Hub and the ASEM ministries of education or labor in a meeting – where researchers present their findings and ministries provide feedback to research and vice-versa.
11. ASEF recognises the lifelong learning agenda as a priority. It has consistently supported the LLL Hub since 2005, when the Hub established formal links with ASEF. The first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in July 2008



between ASEF and the ASEM Research and Education Hub (2008-2010). This was followed by a 2nd MOU (2011-2013) signed in May 2009.

Lifelong learning and Globalisation - in pursuit of knowledge societies and competitiveness

12. Lifelong learning enhances the quality of labour force towards improved employment opportunities. Policy and decision makers around the world share the same conviction that the quality of workforce is the *“the driving force behind the 21st Century economy is knowledge, and developing human capital is the best way to ensure prosperity”* - a well-qualified labour force is crucial for every country to ensure competitiveness and prosperityⁱ. The ASEM LLL Hub has brought into discussion topics of crucial importance for both developed and developing countries especially in enhancing the quality of workforce and addressing the gaps between the education sector and the labour market.
13. On the other hand, continued growth in the economy is also dependent on increasing the labour force. This supply includes those who currently have difficulty keeping a foothold in the labour market *as they have to be retrained to take on new jobs*. For political, economical and social reasons; therefore, the agenda of Lifelong learning has been prominent in the discussions of the ASEM Education Ministers. This bridge between the education and the labour market through lifelong learning initiatives provides better development and learning opportunities for children adults to strengthen their personal development and employability.
14. **Global sustainability** Through its initiatives, the ASEM LLL Hub gives opportunities for researchers, educationists and policy makers in the two regions to join efforts in building a learning society, which is desirable asset for any society or country that wishes to thrive.



Conclusion

15. Lifelong learning as a policy agenda between Asia and Europe has been growing steadily. ASEF and the ASEM LLL Hub strive to bridge the gaps and to create a new awareness in this field. However, the lifelong learning initiatives and efforts will only be sustained with the support not only from the ASEM governments but also from other players such as institutions in the education sector, business and other civil society stakeholders.
16. I sincerely hope that our discussions and brainstorming in this Conference will result in a more co-ordinated action to support LLL in ASEM countries.
17. Allow me to reiterate at this juncture, ASEF's high appreciation of the Government of Vietnam, the ASEM Education and Research Hub for LLL and the Danish School of Education, for making this important event possible.
18. May I wish you a productive meeting and a happy time in the beautiful and sunny beach city of Nha Trang!
19. Thank you for your kind attention!

ⁱ *National Governors Association, 2001*

ⁱⁱ *Denmark's Strategy on Lifelong learning, 2007, p6*

