Keynote Speech

Challenges and Tasks for ACEIU

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Introduction

HE Mr Ja SONG, Minister of Education, ROK
Mr. Koichiro Matsura, Director-General, UNESCO
Dr. KWON Tai-joon, Secretary-General, Korean National Commission
Representatives of Member States of UNESCO
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a great honour for me to be with you today at the inauguration of the Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding. I have long believed that we must assign a much higher priority in our education policy and programmes in this region to education for international understanding and to the promotion of regional co-operation in the context of APEID. When visiting the Ichon Centre with the Korean National Commission just over five years ago, the possibility that it might one day become a regional centre for education for international understanding was very much on our agenda, and I have been very happy to have played a role in supporting the efforts of my friends in the Korean National Commission to help make this dream a reality. It is thus with some sense of parental pride that I am delighted to be here. My task this morning is to help set the developmental chart of our new infant for the future.

Let me begin by outlining why I see the promotion of education for international understanding in the Asia-Pacific region must assume a much higher priority in our
international, regional and national education programmes and then move to some of the tasks for which ACEIU might play a key role.

**Challenges facing Education at the dawn of the 21st Century**

Conceived while the bombs were still falling in the darkest hours of World War II, UNESCO was established by world leaders who, mindful of the failures of nationalistic education systems, were determined to ensure that education in future would be reshaped so as to build a better future for all but building the defences of peace in the minds of men and women. Education for international understanding and the promotion of co-operation among Member States from all region has therefore always been central to the mission of UNESCO.

Of course, over the past fifty-five years, the nature of threats to world peace and security have changed: the Cold War is over and the bulk of the violence now stems more often from the breakdown of social ties and moral order within nations than wars between them. At the dawn of the new millennium, we find that in our constantly changing global village, globalisation represents a powerful standardizing force, but also that it is leading to greater cultural diversity in every country, greater interdependence among nations, greater inequality and new opportunities and threats. In an intensely competitive world, we must discover ways in which diverse cultural groups can and should live together, respect the dignity and worth of each person, learn to share and care about our common future.

The rapidity and scope of the transformations underway at the end of this century not only mean that our fate is increasingly linked with that of others, but paradoxically, it also has created greater political and economic uncertainty, larger gaps between nations and greater cultural diversity within them. Unity within diversity is difficult, but it is the only option for every nation and for the Asian-Pacific region if we really want peace and development for our children.

The political and economic restructuring underway has had a significant, often negative, impact on the social institutions (family, community, school, church or mosque) which form the contexts within which our children develop. In particular, many Asian-Pacific countries are deeply worried about the problems of drugs, HIV-AIDS and violence - seeing them as manifestations of an underlying "moral crisis"
facing our world. The most serious threats to our security are now largely from within our nations, rather than between them. And in all regions of the world, there are calls to produce a statement of values or a moral code to guide educational policy and practice. Indeed, the Ministers of Education of this region at MINEDAP VI placed moral education as its top priority for regional co-operation.

For its part, UNESCO has continued the process of dialogue among the religions, philosophies, cultures and educators of the world in the search for a common substratum of values that make co-existence possible on a worldwide scale and provide a global dimension to the curriculum and our rights and responsibilities as citizens of a given nation and of the world. Public opinion surveys in many countries of the world show that there is wide agreement on the values and principles which should be taught to children, particularly concern for others, responsibility, good manners, tolerance and respect for other people.

We live in a world in which some 10,000 societies, each with their own culture, co-exist in about 200 states. Building peace and resolving conflicts globally or within any nation is not possible unless there is an underlying unity in the diversity of cultures and religions. Much of the work of UNESCO has involved the quest for that unity, for a universal set of values which all societies and recognized religions accept. The Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development (UNESCO, 1995) defines these underlying common values as “a global ethics” and sees the principles of democracy, peace, human rights and pluralism as basic ingredients. But at the same time, our global ethic stresses respect for the dignity and worth of every individual, every culture. How then does one combine the universality of core values with an acknowledgement of different cultures, social interests and individual freedoms?

Somewhere we must find a way around the impossible choice between a mass culture which unites the world in the consumption of the same products and the differentialism which confines us all in closed communities unable to communicate other than through the market or war, between the disappearance of all differences in a mass globalised society and the direct clash of these differences and communities. Seeking an educational programme which equips our children and adults with the knowledge, skills, values and sensitivities to resolve ongoing and new conflicts peacefully are key tasks for UNESCO and, in this region for the ACEIU. As Touraine
(UNESCO, 1998) put it "Education must not be merely a means of strengthening society: it must also serve to build personalities capable of innovating, resisting and communicating, affirming their universal right, and acknowledging that of others, to participate in the modern technical age with their own personalities, memories, languages and desires."

The UNESCO document "Towards a Culture of Peace" submitted to the 1997 General Assembly of the UN outlines the extent to which is an agreed ethical basis, a set of universal principles for developing and assessing educational programmes for a desirable future society, global and national. The document makes it clear that from an international perspective, the basic human values on which education should be built are those which have been established and reaffirmed over the years in a number of standard-setting instruments, beginning with the Constitutions of the UN and UNESCO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and more recently in the Declaration and Integrated Framework for Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy (UNESCO, 1995). The challenge is that of ensuring these values which centre on human rights and the dignity and worth of each individual and culture help define educational priorities and practice, rather than those which are based on a given economic ideology or imposed by any powerful political, religious or cultural group.

Today, our populations have become much more diverse in terms of culture, religion and agendas. It is no longer possible or appropriate to use a particular religious tradition or the authority of the ruler to determine, justify or impose universalism of culture and its associated educational policy and practice. Slowly we are beginning to see the richness and diversity of cultures which make up our nations and the Asia-Pacific region as an asset rather than as a liability; to understand that diversity is valuable in its own right as the expression of human creativity; that recognition of each cultural identity is required by democratic principles of equity, human rights and self-determination; that as with biological diversity, it provides the basic elements for adaptation and survival in times of change while serving as a reservoir of knowledge and experience.

Thus we see, on the one hand in the history of education the demand for an education which aims at developing social cohesion and respect for common values, but on the other, an education which is respectful of the dignity of every individual
and every cultural identity. But can education promote unity in diversity within the Asia-Pacific region, and if so, how?

Long ago, one of my heroes, Mahatma Gandhi gave us an answer: “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the culture of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” Gandhi remains an inspiration to all who seek to oppose violence and to mobilize diverse groups in support of a larger vision of unity. He understood the value of cultural diversity.

For Europe, education for international (or at least European) understanding has been seen by the EU and the Council of Europe as every bit as important in laying the foundations for the future as political or economic agreements: thus the massive investments in co-operative education programmes throughout Europe. What we need at the dawn of the 21st century is a Ghandi-like vision and an EU type action for the Asia-Pacific region. For our region to develop, we must also learn to live and work together, to respect each other’s languages and cultures, and to put aside our old hatreds and indifference to the plight of the our neighbours.

As I have stressed elsewhere (Power, 2000), global forces mean that we will live in increasingly multi-cultural and inter-dependent societies, and thus we need to develop education policies and programmes which eliminate old and new types of discrimination in education, show much greater respect for the rights and cultures of minorities, and to promote intercultural understanding and tolerance of other religions and national cultures. We do need to replace the melting pot model by a mosaic, rich in diversity but nonetheless having a clear unifying pattern based on global ethics and regional solidarity.

However diverse cultures and religions may be and however determined we may be to respect each cultural identity, national governments must make decisions about education priorities and the curriculum, they must frame policies and they will do so on the basis of value positions, be they more or less agreed, more or less explicit. And as in any community, schools, be they secular or religious, cannot function without a reasonably coherent, consistent and shared set of values on which to base the myriad of professional and moral decisions to be made in building responsible citizens.
Human Rights and International Understanding

In the fifty years that have passed since the Declaration of Universal Rights was proclaimed, almost all countries have ratified it. A surprisingly large number of national educational laws contain the key elements of Article 26. Basic Education for All is an essential condition for participatory democracy, and repeatedly nations around the world on occasions such as the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 have reaffirmed the principle. In April at Dakar, we found that since 1990 most developing countries are making slow but steady progress in quantitative terms, but much remains to be done by all countries to meet the basic learning needs of all. But as the latest World Education Report concludes, the biggest challenge we face relates more to the purposes of education than access. Paragraph 2 of the Universal Declaration insists that the education we provide must promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and groups of the region and the world.

However much we may espouse education for international understanding as a key goal of education for the future, we need to recognize that in everyday life, including life in schools and universities, we do always act in conformity with the values we espouse. Each generation must identify and struggle to surmount the barriers, old and new, which reinforce our national prejudices and weaken our resolve to make cut back on the national to create more space for regional and international understanding. We must look critically at our own biases and attitudes, and understand what aspects of our existing political, economic and social systems contribute to inequity, poverty, violence, drug abuse and exclusion, as well as new threats to security and social cohesion which stem from the economic and social structural transformations of the information age.

Globalisation and new communication technologies threaten further marginalisation of the poor and minority cultures. We are witnessing a rise everywhere of intolerance, violence, ultra-nationalism and xenophobia, the fear of difference of any kind: of skin colour, language, ethnic origin or sex, and too often we see the new technologies being used to corrupt rather than to educate. There are new threats to security, new forms of violence and indoctrination more subtle than those of the fascist regimes, but perhaps even more dangerous. In many cases, conflicts and tensions - ethnic, social, religious or linguistic - draw on the many
sources of individual and community frustration created by the spread of poverty, exclusion and injustice inflamed by misuse of our new tools of communication. The ACEIU and UNESCO do need to play a role in promoting the development and exchange of high quality educational software, multimedia packages and networks as well as conventional teaching materials to prepare a new generation of young people with the inner strength needed to say no to violence and racism, and with a commitment to continue to learn more of the languages, literature, history and cultural achievements of others throughout their lives.

Our century has been as much one of sound and fury as of economic and social progress - progress that in any case has not been equally shared. It is a world of enormous and constant change, and as such, one in which cultures are constantly being forced to change or die. The threats to our common future stemming from the reduction in the earth’s cultural richness and diversity stemming from modernization and globalisation are no less real than the threat to ecological diversity. Sadly, in Australia as in most of the new world, education was too often used as a tool of assimilation and played a key role in the loss of cultural identity for indigenous and minority immigrant groups. It has only been in the last twenty years or so that we have deliberately set out to develop education policies and programmes based on values which respect the dignity of all peoples and aim to help our children to value the richness and diversity of cultures within our country.

In my view, the multi-cultural and multi-lingual educational policies of recent years have contributed much to the building of stable, cohesive democracies in which the way of life and rights of most, but not all, major cultural groups are respected. Nonetheless, as recent events in several Asian-Pacific countries remind us, intolerance, racism and xenophobia lurk in the dark corners of most societies, and are likely to breed quickly in times of economic or political uncertainty.

At the end of this century, we need now to re-examine educational priorities in a situation in which the threats to peace and security are predominantly internal rather than external. ACEIU together with APNIEVE could help Member States to look critically at their successes and shortcomings in ensuring that their educational systems are effective in developing the values which will make for peace, democracy and respect for human rights, and while exploring ways in we can modify educational
policy and practice to take advantage of new communication technologies and major structural transformations underway at the end of this century.

I would like to propose that we think of an education programme for the ACEIU under the general umbrella of UNESCO’s international and regional programme which aims at promoting multiple citizenships, a composite identity wherein the treasure within, the full development of the individual personality through a programme with a balanced emphasis on learning to know, to do, to live together and to be is actualized in ways which enable the young to participate effectively in a rapidly changing and uncertain world, to assume their responsibilities as citizens of the Asia-Pacific region as well as the world, as well as their own country.

The concept of “multiple citizenships” begins with an acceptance of the oneness of the human family and the interconnectedness of all nations, cultures and religions as we address global and regional problems. It implies, for example, that we systematically seek to develop through national education programmes, a passionate respect for the “inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family” as the “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (preamble of International Declaration, 1948).

World citizenship does not imply an abandonment of legitimate national and cultural loyalties, nor the abolition of national autonomy, nor the imposition of uniformity. It does imply unity in diversity, internationally as well as nationally. As Gandhi stressed indeed the Universal Declaration demands, understanding and respecting the culture and religion of others is possible only if one respects one’s own cultural identity. While much of our education must focus on our own national languages, literature, history, rights and responsibilities, we must also acknowledge that our education systems tend to be somewhat ethnocentric and nationalistic. In the 21st century, we will need to give much greater attention to developing an understanding of, and respect for, the richness and diversity of the world’s cultures and ecosystems, to global issues, universally accepted values, and our rights and responsibilities as citizens of the world.

The Report of the International Commission for Education in the 21st century begins with an analysis of the global tensions facing us, between the global and local
(as described above), the universal and the individual, tradition and modernity, long-
term and short-term considerations; competition and equality of opportunity; the
spiritual and the material. For the Commission, designing and building our common
future means: “a renewed emphasis on the moral and cultural dimensions of
education, enabling each person to grasp the individuality of other people and to
understand the world’s erratic progression towards a certain unity: but this process
must begin with self-understanding through an inner voyage whose milestones are
knowledge, meditation and the practice of self-criticism.”

The title of the Delors Report (Learning: the Treasure Within) conveys its
central message: learning, that is, everything that humanity has learned about itself, is
the treasure within the rich diversity of cultures which make up our global village.
To find the treasure within, the ACEIU together with other Centres like the ACCU in
Japan could encourage our educators to explore the accumulated wisdom, literature,
knowledge and values of their own and other Asian-Pacific cultures.

Whereas the Report of the International Commission provides a broad
framework for reflection and debate on the types of educational reforms needed to
build a peaceful, pluralistic democratic society, ACEIU must at a more practical level
seek to articulate what this means in terms of educational policy, curriculum and
teacher education programmes, publishing and disseminating many reference
materials in many languages to promote “a culture of peace and non-violence.”

Given the theme of this Conference, it is important to recall that the Ministers
of Education of the Member States of UNESCO approved at the 1994 International
Conference on Education and formally adopted during the 1995 General Conference,
a Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human
Rights and Democracy. The Ministers promised to base their education systems on
“principles and methods that contribute to the building of respect for others, human
rights,” and to “strengthen the formation of values and abilities such as solidarity,
creativity, civic responsibility, the ability to resolve conflicts by non-violent means,”
to introduce into curricula “education for citizenship which includes an international
dimension, the ethical, religious and philosophical bases of human rights, their
historical sources,” “national and international standards such as the Universal
Declaration of Human Rights,” the problem of racism and the history of the fight
against sexism and all other forms of discrimination and exclusion, and “curriculum
reforms which emphasise knowledge, understanding and respect for the cultures of others" and linking "global problems to local action."

The Integrated Framework sets out the aims of education for international understanding; strategies, policies and lines of action; teaching materials and resources; programmes, teacher education; action on behalf of vulnerable groups; non-formal education, higher education; co-ordination of effort with family, media and other agents of socialisation etc. If governments and their Ministries were to meet their commitments and follow the guidelines which they approved, considerable progress can be made.

To assist Member States, UNESCO has studied their policies and programmes (eg. Teacher Training and Multiculturalism, IBE, 1995), monitored the extent to which they meet their legal obligations with respect to Conventions like that on Discrimination in Education and, if necessary, draw their attention to allegations of violations; developed manuals to illustrate exemplary practice (eg. UNESCO Kit on The Practice of Citizenship, Manual for Human Rights Education, Education for Tolerance, Language Education in Multi-cultural Societies), supported bilateral co-operation, NGOs and networks to promote the revision of school history and geography textbooks, values education and civics education; promoted education for religious, cultural and linguistic pluralism, and linked schools serving violent communities.

For more than 40 years, the Associated Schools Network has linked schools (currently about 6,000) from all regions (over 150 countries) and has served as a grass-roots movement of teachers and students aimed at promoting international understanding and intercultural dialogue and co-operation in the production of practical and innovative approaches to education. For example, the ASP "Peace Pack" is presently being experimented in over 80 countries, and the World Heritage Educational Resource Kit for Teachers "World Heritage in Young Hands" containing videos, CD-ROM and materials developed by the schools on their heritage sites provides an attractive resource to promote appreciation of the richness and diversity of the world's cultures. I certainly see the ACEIU as a focal point for encouraging co-operation among the leaders and students of our Associated Schools network in this region. It is an ideal setting for launching sustained developmental projects in which teachers and students from ASP schools work together to develop
teaching and learning materials aimed at promoting an understanding of each others cultures and for understanding and reducing tensions and conflicts among neighbours.

Promoting education for international understanding based on mutual respect for the dignity of the individual and his or her culture is most difficult in conflict situations. Under the Culture of Peace programme we are trying to build peace in situations where there is, or has been a history of violence within or between nations. Difficult though it may be, the ACEIU and UNESCO in its regional programme must do its best to build the foundations of international understanding by working with the education authorities and teachers of member states to eliminate all forms of racism, stereotyping and distortions of history and to promote educational exchanges aimed at promoting solidarity within the region – just as the EU and Council of Europe have tried to do in Europe. I would also like to stress the need to disarm our history (i.e. to focus more on the human and cultural achievements of our nations and the region) and to promote (as we have with our Associated Schools movement) heroes of peace like Gandhi and Martin Luther King rather than of war. Thus I would hope that the ACEIU will build on its past successes as a place in which in the tranquillity of the forests of Ichon, youth leaders, ASP teachers and students, curriculum and assessment specialists, teacher educators and educational administrators from many parts of Asia and the Pacific can work together in practical ways to translate the ideals of education for international understanding into action in their fields of competence.

Finally, I should stress the importance of educational research and cooperation in the development of educational statistics and indicator systems. Given the strong emphasis on values, moral education and international understanding in the region, it seems to me to be imperative that we do not allow the internationalisation of education and the global indicator systems being used to assess national progress to be dominated by market economists: we must develop new systems for judging the extent to which we have been effective in promoting international understanding, tolerance and respect for the rights and dignity of others – and not just focus on achievement in maths and science, the utilization of internet or the expansion of virtual universities as indicators of quality.

Conclusion
We need to change our own concepts and practice of power in schools, the
work place, economic, national and international politics from one based on force,
sel-interest and aggression to one based on respect for human rights and cultural
differences, participation, consensus and non-violent social change. To do so will
not be easy in a world accustomed to resolving conflicts by force and where national
and self interest often triumph over the common good. For example, if it has proved
difficult for the Council of Europe to promote its programme for constructing
European citizenship through education and training, we should pretend that it will be
easier to promote our international rights and responsibilities as citizens of the Asia-
Pacific region or as world citizens: few curriculum guidelines have followed the
example of Norway which does seek to do so, and few school systems other than the
International Baccalaureat will withhold their graduation certificate if community
service requirements are not met.

Our common future will rest on whether we do manage to educate ourselves
throughout life for richness and diversity in an international context where the
greatest threats to security, democracy and equity lie within. The ACEIU will help
Member States in this region if serves as the focal point for a select number of
mutually agreed programmes for ASP, history and language teachers, curriculum and
assessment specialists and teacher educators which focus on the sharing of policies,
practices and materials aimed promoting greater understanding of the cultures,
religions and values of the rich tapestry which makes up the Asia-pacific region: that
is the treasure within which the ACEIU must help us discover and share.
Reference


