

## **Opening Remarks by Jan Ifversen**

### **Vice-dean for Knowledge Exchange and Internationalization, Aarhus University**

Dear Minister for Children and Education, Mrs. Christine Antorini,

Dear Deputy Minister of Human Resource Policy, Mr. Kwan-Bok Kim,

Dear Ambassador and Director, Mr. Quoc Khanh,

Distinguished speakers and guests,

My name is Jan Ifversen. I am Vice-dean for Knowledge Exchange and Internationalization at the newly established Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University. It is a great pleasure for me to open the conference on learning unlimited organized within the framework of the ASEM Education and research Hub for Life Long Learning. Internationalization is part of my task as vice-dean, and ASEM is an important organization for international cooperation between Asia and Europe. In Denmark, we are specifically proud to host ASEM meetings. As many of you will remember, the 2002 high level summit within ASEM took place in Copenhagen. The decision to establish a research and education hub for lifelong learning within ASEM was actually taken at the 2002 summit. Three years later the hub emerged as a lively framework of cooperation between an important number of Asian, European and Australian universities within the area of lifelong learning. Since then research networks, conferences, joint publications, staff mobility and joint teaching programmes have borne witness to the astute activity of the hub. We are proud to host the secretariat here at our campus in Emdrup within the auspices of what has now become the Department of Education at the Faculty of Arts. We are also proud that we - together with prestigious universities in the UK and Spain - offer an international MA programme in lifelong learning within the framework the European Mundus.

Lifelong learning is a crucial activity in the current societies which are determined by the conditions of a globalized knowledge economy. Although it has been on the agenda for many decades – UNESCO already advanced lifelong learning in the early seventies – it has acquired new dimensions in the transition from the industrial to the postindustrial world. The European council in 2004 included lifelong learning as one of the assets in preparing the European economies for the heightened competitiveness of globalization. The former Danish government launched its national strategy for lifelong learning in 2007. Although couched in a discourse of development of human resources the focus was primarily on up skilling the work force in order to enhance economic competitiveness. This is certainly an important goal in itself; but as many of you will discuss today and tomorrow, lifelong learning entails more than training the workforce. It is also about personal investment in knowledge, carrier planning, democracy, civic education and social cohesion. Lifelong learning can be equaled to executive education, but it is more than that. The current government has a goal of raising the level of young people entering higher education to sixty percent. An important goal that we fully support. Higher education is not only a way of securing a good life; it is an urgent investment for society. So is

adult learning. To promote a culture of learning as a never ending project is a way to secure social cohesion. I was much inspired by an interview given by Professor Andy Green from London and published in a recent issue of ASEM Magazine for Lifelong Learning. Professor Green is one of the distinguished speakers at our conference. He highlighted the importance of lifelong learning for securing social cohesion through the creation of equal access to education. I fully endorse this perspective, which seems to take us from the more classical paradigm on personal development or civic education to more current challenges. Social cohesion is a major challenge in a world influenced by the pressures from globalization. It is also among those grand societal challenges that the EU have targeted in its ambitious research programme horizon 2020, where it appears under the heading *inclusive, innovative and secure societies*. I think Professor Green's reconceptualization of lifelong learning only demonstrates the necessity of advancing research in the area. Lifelong learning is embedded in educational systems that might differ according to the paradigms and ideologies endorsed. An important task of this conference is to provide evidence for the functioning and malfunctioning of systems and to discuss best practices. But education and not least lifelong learning is also about culture. To examine differences, recognize diversities and learn from each other we need international cooperation among researchers. We thus need frameworks like the ASEM research and education hub. We need to be aware of diversities, just as we need to learn from each other. I am particularly happy that the Korean minister for human resource policy has agreed to participate. Korea is among those Asian countries that raises admiration worldwide for its educational policies. With speakers from a number of Asian countries – China, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Japan – we will witness a true dialogue between Asia and Europe.

The ASEM research and education hub is not only bringing researchers and educationalists together. It is also a platform for dialogue with practitioners and policy makers. Among the distinguished guest we have high level government representatives. And it is a great pleasure that the Danish minister for children and education, Mrs. Antorini is attending the conference. One of the purposes of the hub and the conference is to provide reflections and policy recommendations to our governments. It is about bringing knowledge to society. This is what we at the university now call knowledge exchange. As vice dean for knowledge exchange I can only say that I have come to the right place. What we will witness today and tomorrow is a genuine and productive example of knowledge exchange where researchers will focus their research on those societal challenges that all the practitioners and policy makers have to deal with in order to produce good, active, prosperous, inclusive and cohesive societies.

I look forward to learn more about the outcome of your discussions and wish you a stimulating and engaging two days. Thank you for your attention.