Opening Ceremony: PCF8

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Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Professor Asha Kanwar
President & CEO, Commonwealth of Learning (COL)

Honourable Minister Dr Idris Jusoh, Guest Ministers, Dr Linda Sissons, Professor Dr Mansor Fadzil, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the Eighth Pan Commonwealth Forum. I am delighted that the Chair of our Board of Governors, Dr Linda Sissons, and our distinguished Board members Ambassador Miriam Katagum and Mr Martin Bean, are with us today. Two of the former Presidents of COL, Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Raj Dhanarajan and Sir John Daniel made a special effort to be present. In addition Ministers of Education from five Commonwealth countries, Botswana, Ghana, Nigeria, Swaziland and the Seychelles, have travelled long distances to grace the occasion. The Executive Director of UNWomen, herself an eminent educationist, will enrich the deliberations with her keynote.

These forums are organized with local partners and I must express my sincere thanks to our gracious hosts and partner the Open University Malaysia. Professor Dr Mansor Fadzil has taken personal interest in planning this PCF and his team, particularly the Organising Committee, headed by Prof Ramli Bahroom have devoted considerable time and energy to making this a particularly pleasant and rewarding collaboration.

The PCFs are held in different parts of the Commonwealth. The first was held in neighbouring Brunei, followed by those in South Africa, New Zealand, Jamaica; UK, India and Nigeria. After travelling around the Commonwealth, PCF has returned to Malaysia, truly Asia.

Hon Minister, we are very grateful for the continuing support provided by your government. We also appreciate our partnership with several institutions in Malaysia. I was here earlier this year when Vice Chancellors and senior administrators from 19 countries came to Putrajaya to deliberate on how to enhance the quality and leadership in higher education institutions around the Commonwealth.

Under your leadership, Hon Minister, higher education in Malaysia is undergoing several transformations. Noteworthy among these are the accreditation of prior experiential learning and assigning credits to MOOCs. These are not only major steps in mainstreaming open distance and flexible learning but are also important models for other countries to learn from.

As more governments around the Commonwealth review their policies and action plans in preparation for achieving the SDG 4, which aspires to provide equitable access to quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030, open, distance and flexible learning is increasingly becoming a crucial option that can help address issues of access, quality, costs and equity. Malaysia has a long tradition of leadership in open and distance learning. It has much to share with the rest of the world. The participants representing 55 countries bring their own unique experiences and will take away many new ones from this confluence of ideas around the main theme of this forum ‘Open Online and Flexible Learning: the key to sustainable development’. One key outcome of this forum will be the KL Declaration.
Let me thank our hosts, the Ministry of Higher Education, our partners OUM and all the sponsors, international and local, who have contributed generously to making this event possible. Let me also thank the growing PCF community for their presence. I hope your time here will be both productive and memorable and that you will leave more empowered after the exciting deliberations and return home eager to transform your environments. We are all partners in creating a world, where as the poet Tagore said ‘the mind is without fear and the head is held high, where knowledge is free, where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection’. Let all of us be a part of ushering in that heaven of freedom and enlightenment.