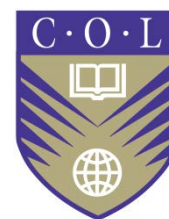# Opening Remarks: Pacific OER Regional Consultation

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Chair, COL Board of Governors, Dr Linda Sissons, Honourable David Collins, Minister of Education, Kiribati, Dr Caroline Seelig, CEO, the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, Distinguished Colleagues, Friends

A very warm welcome to each one of you joining us for the regional consultation on Open Educational Resources for the Pacific. The Commonwealth of Learning is organising these in partnership with UNESCO and the government of Slovenia with generous support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Let me begin by thanking Dr Caroline Seelig and Doug Standring, of the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand for their support and guidance without which we would not have been able to host this meeting here in Auckland. We are also grateful to our UNESCO colleagues who are being represented here today by Joe Hironaka, whose wisdom and insights have enriched two previous consultations. It's good to see our friends Gaspar Mitya and Matija again—all three of them share a passion for openness which you will see expressed in unique ways during the next two days. Thank you for your valuable contributions.

As you know, the Commonwealth of Learning is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government with our headquarters in Metro Vancouver and a regional office in New Delhi. Our mission is to help the 52 Commonwealth Member States and institutions to use technologies for expanding access to quality education and training. COL believes that learning is the key to sustainable development.

Two years ago, the world community adopted the 17 SDGs. SDG 4 aspires to promote equitable and quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. Early reports indicate that many countries will fall way behind this target. Therefore innovative approaches are needed to achieve both speed and scale. COL believes that Open Educational Resources or OER have tremendous potential for increasing access and lowering the costs of quality education. The theme of these consultations then is 'OER for equitable and quality education: from commitment to action'.

This is the final in the series of six consultations. What did we hear in the other regions?

The Asian group raised concerns about poor connectivity, lack of capacity and unavailability of OER in local languages. In some countries, governments are investing vast resources in projects to develop quality content for higher education and lifelong learning.

In Europe, OER were seen as part of a wider ecosystem of transforming education. There was reference to Open Educational Practices and the link between OER and MOCCs. There were many OER initiatives

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in Europe but these were mostly operating in isolation. The need for complementarity and information-sharing was stressed.

The MENA region is bound by a common language Arabic but has a very uneven development of OER. Some countries already developed national OER policies while some participants were hearing about OER for the first time. There are several initiatives to translate existing OER into Arabic.

The African representatives wanted more policies at the national and institutional levels. There was a great deal of discussion on the lack of OER in local languages and suitability for specific cultural contexts.

Latin America and the Caribbean stressed the need for OER in Portuguese and Spanish and voiced their concerns regarding the English language dominating the OER sphere. One of the key aspects noted in the region was that OER is considered a people's movement. Due to the push from the public, policy makers are strongly encouraged to pay serious attention to mainstreaming OER. However, there was a strong push back from the publishers.

So you can see the diversity of concerns in each region—but what was common everywhere was the call for more cooperation and collaboration.

What has been the development of OER in the Pacific? When COL and UNESCO carried out a governmental survey in 2012, we found that OER activity was most prevalent in Australia and New Zealand. In 2010 the National Digital Learning Resource Network owned collectively by the Australian Government Education departments moved to a Creative Commons licence. Scootle, another national repository of digital learning resources was accessible to teachers in the school sector across Australia. OER uptake at that time was strong in the school sector but relatively slower in the university sector. In New Zealand, the ministry of Education funded a small-scale project to develop an OER Commons for the school sector. The Otago Polytechnic was a pioneer in adopting an open intellectual property policy and we know that the OER emerged with the objective of providing free quality tertiary education to anyone anywhere in the world.   Now five years later, what is the status? We know that Australia and New Zealand have open licensing frameworks for public funded content; Fiji has developed a national OER policy, and several institutions including the National University of Samoa, and the Solomon Islands National University are offering OER based courses. Kiribati and Vanuatu are using OER for the school sector.

This consultation will help us to share the OER developments in different countries and suggest a regional perspective that will be incorporated in the final report to be presented to the 2nd World OER Congress. Key experts from the region will give us their overview and insights and we will hear from three Chairs in OER—Dr Wayne Mackintosh, Dr Robin Day and Mitya Jermol. Tomorrow, we will work together to identify concrete actions that different stakeholders need to undertake in order to mainstream OER.

Thanks to each one of you for being part of this important initiative. Let me once again thank our hosts, the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, our partners UNESCO, Slovenia and Hewlett who have all contributed generously to making this event possible.