

Opening speech

H.E. Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan

Honored guests,

Dear delegates,

On behalf of the Vietnamese Government, I would like to extend to you, honorable representatives from Asian and European countries, international organizations as well as all participants taking part in this forum, my warmest welcome and best wishes for your good health and well-being in the coming New Year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In recent years, building a framework for lifelong learning has become an emerging trend, a goal much sought after by many education systems all over the world.

* To know and to be, one must learn.

* To acquire a profession and secure a job, one must learn.

* To make oneself and others happy, one must learn.

* To contribute to the development of the country and of mankind, one must learn.

The Vietnamese have for many generations attached great importance to learning – it is considered a basic foundation for becoming a proper person free from the plight of poverty. “Without teacher, one cannot make his way in the world”, goes the saying that our people have always honored. Right after regaining national independence in August 1945, with over 90% of the population illiterate, President Ho Chi Minh advocated “eliminating the enemy of ignorance”, and launched a nation-wide movement to combat illiteracy. He asserted that “an illiterate nation is a weak nation” and believed that “learning is an unlimited realm”; “As the world moves unceasingly forward” said Ho Chi Minh, “those who fail to learn will fall behind”; “learning should be lifelong.

In 1975, Viet Nam reunified as a wholly independent country after 30 years of struggle for national independence; 25 years later, it attained universalization of primary education when country’s annual GDP per capita remained under 500 USD; in 2010, we achieved universalization of lower secondary education while our annual GDP was 1000 USD. The proportion of students for every 10.000 people is 200, and over 40% of people engaged in higher education study are learners-cum-workers.

The lifelong learning concept was formally institutionalized in the Law on Education in 1998, and adult education and non-formal education have continued to grow by leaps and bounds. In 2005, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam signed the Decision

numbered 112/2005/QĐ-TTg to approve the scheme on “Building a Learning Society in the period of 2005-2010”. One of the fundamental goals of this project is: “... to create good opportunities and favorable conditions for everybody at every stage of life and at whatever level to pursue learning constantly, continually and throughout his/her life at any time, any places and any grades of study; mobilizing the integrated strength of the whole society in building up and promoting educations; every people, every organization sharing the responsibility and the duty of studying and actively participating in building up a learning society.”

In April of 2006, the National Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam advocated “to gradually shift from the current education model toward an open one – namely, the model of learning society with lifelong learning system, continuing, equivalent and interdisciplinary learning forms; establishing and developing a learning network with flexible study and practice modalities, meeting the continuing and lifelong learning demands of the people, generating various possibilities and opportunities for the learners, thus ensuring social equality in education.”

In the Vietnamese education network, there are two open universities -- Ha Noi Open University and Ho Chi Minh City Open University – with distance programs that have engaged, to date, over 85,000 undergraduates, accounting for 6.3% of the total students in the country.

In addition to national education institutions, there are at present 9990 community learning centers managed by authorities at the communal level, covering 89.96% of the communes in the country.

In Viet Nam there exists a nation-wide network for learning promotion, which has its roots in the commune-based units that together form provincial learning promotion chapters which in due course elect a National Executive Committee of Learning Promotion which mobilizes over 7 millions of members including former teachers and political and social workers who are dedicated to promoting the cause of learning for all age-groups. Each year, on the 2nd of October, we celebrate Learning Promotion Day.

Presently, Lifelong Learning in Viet Nam is based on five pillars: Formal Education, Vocational Education, Distance Education, Continuing Education Centers and Community Learning Centers. Still, we recognize that LLL opportunities are currently available to only a very small proportion of the population and that there are limitations in terms of learning quality and outcomes.

With this awareness, Viet Nam earnestly sought to host and co-organize together with ASEM and UNESCO Ha Noi this Lifelong Learning Forum in order to further clarify the concept and the role of lifelong learning in the process of building a learning society and developing national and regional LLL strategies; to share good practices and experiences in implementing LLL strategies among the ASEM nations; to create an open space for sharing research, identifying new ideas, developing

legislative, organizational and financial frameworks among the ASEM states as well as between the countries of our two regions; to encourage academic co-operation in LLL study between and among the ASEM universities and enhance research capacity and broaden perspectives for ASEM researchers in the LLL field; to identify the current situation (within appropriate political, social and cultural contexts, and the advantages as well as the obstacles for LLL development in order to bring about LLL opportunities for all; to strengthen linkages between and among researchers and politicians of the two regions with a view to developing future policies and enhancing LLL programs and activities.

Today, in the Capital City of Hanoi, UNESCO's City for Peace of 1999, the Viet Nam Forum on Lifelong Learning welcomes more than 300 distinguished participants -- ladies and gentlemen representing nations across Asia and Europe -- to this assembly with the common aim of building and improving the LLL network.

The Viet Nam Forum for Lifelong Learning takes place at a time when our country is actively preparing for the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Viet Nam. One of the educational development guidelines which contributes to achieving the goal of national advancement is specified in the document draft to be submitted to the Congress: *“Education and formation has the mission of raising the people’s intellectual standards, cultivating the talents, making significant contributions to building the Vietnamese culture. To develop education and formation, together with the development of science and technology, top the national policies; investment in education and formation is an investment for development. To comprehensively and vigorously renovate the education and formation system to meet the development requirements of the society; enhancing the service’s quality according to the orientation of standardization, modernization, socialization and effectively serving the cause of building and safeguarding the Fatherland. **Vigorously promote the building of a learning society, generating opportunities and conditions of lifelong learning for all and every citizen.**”*

At the same time, Viet Nam is preparing a strategy of education development for the period of 2011-2020 and a scheme on building a learning society in the period of 2011-2020; in which LLL is considered as both a goal and a measure for building a learning society. One of the important criteria maintained by our country is: *“... to ensure necessary conditions to facilitate all people of all age-groups, at all levels to pursue learning constantly and throughout their lives so as to contribute to raising the intellectual standards of the people and the capacity of the citizens, enhancing the quality of our human resources as well as that of the individual lives, of the families and of the society as a whole.”*

We see this Forum as an excellent opportunity for Viet Nam to learn and to share experiences with our partner countries with the view of building and further improving our LLL system.

I hope that this forum will contribute to Viet Nam and the other nations represented here today discovering solutions appropriate to attaining the goal of developing LLL systems and building learning societies.

In this spirit, I declare the opening of the Viet Nam Forum: Lifelong Learning -p Building a Learning Society.

On behalf of the Vietnamese Prime Minister, I am honored to thank ASEM and UNESCO Ha Noi for their valuable contributions in terms of ideas and essential support to the organization of this event. I would like to convey to the honorable representatives and ambassadors of the participating countries, to His Excellency, Mr Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, to, Madam Katherine Müller-Marin, UNESCO Representative to Viet Nam, to Dr. Arne Carlsen, Chairman of the ASEM LLL Hub, to all our distinguished international and national guests, my best wishes for your good health and happiness.

Thank you very much!