

**THE 2ND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT, LANGUAGE REVITALIZATION AND
MULTILINGUAL EDUCATION IN ETHNOLINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES**

**Welcome Speech
by
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Tuesday, 1 July 2008
4thFloor Conference Room, Twin Towers Hotel, Bangkok

Dr Chinnapat Bhumirat, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Thailand

Distinguished Participants,

International visitors,

Friends from Thailand,

Guest speakers,

Dear colleagues and students,

It is my great privilege to greet you all to the Second Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Ethnolinguistic Communities. First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to SIL International, UNESCO, South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO), UNICEF, CARE International, and Save the Children for their thoughtful support in preparation for this Conference. Thanks also go for their continuous efforts in supporting ethnolinguistic communities in development, revitalization, and maintenance of their heritage languages.

Increasingly, issues regarding the preservation of languages and cultures of ethnolinguistic communities need to be addressed at a global level. Over the past decade, ethnolinguistic communities, supported by governments and NGOs in several countries of Asia and the Pacific, have begun implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education programs. Also during that time, a number of NGOs and universities have begun supporting ethnolinguistic communities in their efforts to develop, revitalize and maintain their heritage languages.

In spite of these efforts, the purposes and benefits of language development, language revitalization and multilingual education are still not widely understood or accepted. Many efforts remain weak and do not build on what has been learned through research and experiences elsewhere. More information is needed about what is involved in planning, implementing and sustaining strong language development and multilingual education programs.

Some of you may have attended the first conference hosted by UNESCO, SIL International, and Mahidol University in 2003. As such, you are certainly aware of how successful the conference was in addressing different issues on language development, language revitalization and multilingual education and in providing a platform for enhancing communication as well as collaborations among scholars in the field. We hope that the current conference will continue this trend and that we will experience thought-provoking presentations and lively exchanges of views during these three days. I would also strongly encourage the participants to brainstorm, to share information about good practices, and to develop and expand networks of individuals and organizations engaged in these efforts, as this will enhance not only communication but also cooperation among us all.

We are all gathered here for the next three days for one special purpose, that is, to save the languages and cultures of ethnolinguistic communities around the world. We will share our experiences, our knowledge, and our wisdom in thoughtful and practical ways since the nature of the threat that faces all of us, regardless of which ethnolinguistic communities we are working with or where they are, requires extensive collaboration. No one community, no one government, no one institution, no one NGO is able to meet the challenge alone. The threat will only be reduced if different groups, with different experiences, different expertise, different resources, and different ways of thinking come together in a single effort; the effort to help the world's ethnolinguistic communities save their heritage languages and cultures.

In this respect, I sincerely hope that this conference – building on the legacy of the previous conference and supported by even more organizations and institutions at this time – will provide an opportunity to continue moving towards global solutions and taking the required initiatives. I will leave you with a popular quote from an American Cultural Anthropologist, Margaret Mead:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Once again, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the Second Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization, and Multilingual Education in Ethnolinguistic Communities.

Thank you for your kind attention.
