

Welcoming address

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International visitors, friends from Thailand, guest speakers, colleagues, and students,

Allow me to welcome you all to Bangkok, to the Royal River Hotel, and, especially, to this first Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education in Asia. Mahidol University is very proud to be co-sponsoring this conference with UNESCO and SIL International because we are three institutions involved in learning and working in a multilingual and multicultural world. That world is currently changing in many ways and in very rapid ways.

There is a danger that with all the many changes, something of great value will be lost. In this case, that “something of great value” refers to our languages and cultures—products of many hundreds, and in some cases, thousands, of generations of people living and learning together.

There is also a danger that while some people and communities enter easily and profitably into new ways of gaining and applying knowledge, other communities, especially minority language communities, are being left out, perhaps even forced out, to positions on the periphery of progress.

Language development, language revitalization and multilingual education are relatively new terms to scholarly research, civil society interest, and governmental involvement. All three terms have gained increasing recognition in the past twenty years. The concerns, needs and contributions of minority language groups need to be addressed while there is still time to do something about them.

We have gathered here for the next three days to listen to each other and to share our experiences, our knowledge, and our wisdom in thoughtful and practical ways. Why? Because the nature of the danger that faces Asia’s, and other regions’, linguistic and cultural diversity requires extensive collaborations. No one community, no one government, no one institution, no one non-governmental organization is able to meet the challenge. The danger will only be avoided if different groups, with different experience, different expertise, different resources, different ways of thinking can work together to make the world safe for differences in language and culture.

Let us hope together that our sharing and interactions during the next three days will contribute in a positive way toward the development of a region and a world in which languages and cultures can be seen, not as a problem but as a rich resource and a basic human right.

Therefore it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this, our first Conference on Language Development, Language Revitalization and Multilingual Education.