

## Opening Address from Rector, United Nations University

Hans van Ginkel\*



It is my great honour and pleasure to be here in Kesennuma and welcome you at this important Seminar. I heard that this is the 7th UNESCO-Japan Seminar on Environmental Education in the Asia-Pacific region, but the first one that is convened by the Miyagi University of Education. It is, indeed, wonderful to come to Kesennuma, one of the smaller, but highly attractive cities in Japan and to see that the city has developed such excellent educational programmes on environmental education, together with Miyagi University of Education and other partners.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To promote education for sustainable development, the United Nations University (UNU) took the lead at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 to mobilize 11 major global organizations to work on EfSD and jointly sign the Ubuntu Declaration, which creates a major global alliance to promote science and technology courses and teaching throughout educational systems, formal and non-formal, worldwide. I firmly believe that science and technology should play a key role to reorient and strengthen educational curricula for sustainability. Higher education should play an active role especially in training and re-training of school teachers and developing the curricula and stimulating learning materials.

It is also important to recognize that new ethics need to be established to attain sustainable development, contributing to changing lifestyles, for instance, on the basis of the guiding principles and perspectives of the Earth Charter.

As many of you are aware, the United Nations General Assembly adopted in December 2002 the resolution to promote the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), from January 2005.

The United Nations University has been undertaking various initiatives on this topic, in particular at the higher education level; including the Global Virtual University, the Asia Pacific Initiative for Sustainable Development. In 2003, the United Nations University started a new programme on education for sustainable development, in which various activities has been undertaken.

As a spear point activity under this programme, we have proposed to generate Regional Centers of Excellence on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs), to promote education for sustainable development at regional/local levels. At these centers, various potential partners, including school teachers, university professors, researchers, experts in museums, representatives of local governments and business communities, will get together, share their information and experiences, improve their activities and explore possibility for new collaboration. The aim of these centres is to improve

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the exchange of information and the cooperation between researchers, educators and media specialists working in different institutions, at different levels and in different sectors.

In this Seminar, I hope you can share experiences on environmental education and in broader sense education for sustainable development among countries of the Asia-Pacific region, and get ready to start activities for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Last but not least, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the organizers for their significant effort to arrange this important Seminar, and hope that all the participants have productive and fruitful outcomes at the end of the Seminar.

I thank you very much for your attention.