

Address

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Good morning to our overseas representatives participating in today's seminar, as well as our other participants.

It is my great pleasure to present the opening address on behalf of the National Institute of Special Education for the opening of the twenty-second Asia-Pacific Special Education International Seminar.

First, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to everyone participating in this educational seminar. At the same time, I am very grateful that the seminar is being held again this year with overseas representatives who are working hard to enhance and develop special education in their own countries.

In the field of special education, it is important to provide specific education under special consideration in order to draw out the full potential of disabled children and to allow these children to fully display their real abilities. It is also important to provide appropriate education that will allow these children to become independent, active members of society. Society as a whole, including elementary and junior high school students, must deepen its understanding and awareness of disabled children.

Problems faced and challenges to overcome may differ among countries; however, while recognizing these differences, it is essential that we continue assisting and encouraging disabled children to overcome various problems and actively participate in society.

We firmly believe that everyone can learn from the experience of different countries, even though the efforts directed toward special education differ in each country.

Furthermore, I strongly believe that the exchange of information on special education in different countries will greatly enhance the development of special education.

As an APEID special education seminar held through the joint sponsorship of the National Institute of Special Education and the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO, this seminar has been held annually since 1981 with the purpose to enhance special education in APEID member countries.

And since 1981, 289 overseas participants, including government officials, researchers and educators, have been invited from the Asia-Pacific region.

At last year's twenty-first seminar, APEID's sixth-term project plan was completed and the framework of APEID significantly revised, with the conventional classification of special education eliminated.

From FY2002, this seminar will be held as the "Asia-Pacific Special Education International Seminar," and under the same joint sponsorship with the Japanese National Commission for

UNESCO, the seminar will focus on specific themes, and its achievements will be disseminated to workers in the field of education throughout the world as a means to further contribute to the development of education.

This year's theme is the present situation and problems related to education for children with visual and hearing impairments, and research presentations and a symposium will specifically address this theme.

The issue of education has become a global issue in recent years. The realization of equal, less restricted education for all children is no longer the issue of a single country; "education for all" and the promotion of independence and participation in society are the common goals of education today. During this seminar, discussions focusing on education for visually and hearing impaired children will be held, and I expect this seminar to be an excellent opportunity, both to learn from the experience of each other and to develop cooperative relationships.

In conclusion, the Ministry of Education was renamed the "Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology" as part of the reorganization of central ministries and agencies in January 2001, and the "Special Education Division" responsible for the administration of special education was renamed the "Special Support Education Division." In the past, special education was based on the concept of offering appropriate education based on the type and level of disability in special environments, such as schools for the deaf and blind, schools for physically and mentally challenged children, and classes for children with learning disabilities; a change in concept is required, however, making it essential that we understand the special education needs of disabled pupils and students and offer appropriate educational assistance. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology is actively implementing measures for pupils and students who require special education support in regular elementary and junior high school classrooms. Our institute was established as a direct agency under the Ministry of Education in 1971, and was reconstituted as the "National Institute of Special Education" in 2001.

This year's seminar is comprised of research presentations and a symposium, and I fully expect our research institute to strive for even greater international cooperation contributing to the development of special education internationally while cooperating with everyone in the Asia-Pacific region.

I would like to close my opening address with the hope that today's discussions and opinion exchanges will be meaningful to all participants.

Thank you very much.