

67th OMEP World Conference

Opening Address

Dr. Maggie Koong

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On behalf of the World Executive Committee, I am delighted to welcome all delegates and guests to Washington D.C. for the 67th OMEP World Conference! It is my honor to be able to address you as the World President of OMEP and to be joined by 500 members of 40 national committees at this event. I also wish to take this opportunity to give my heartfelt thanks to OMEP-USA for hosting this year's World Assembly and Conference. It would not have been possible for us to organize such a large-scale event without the meticulous arrangements and steadfast effort by the members of OMEP-USA over the many months of preparation for this conference.

The theme of this World Conference — Early Childhood Pathways to Sustainability — reflects the vital role of early childhood development (ECD) on the global development agenda. A growing and convincing body of research, grounded in neuroscience, economics, and developmental and behavioral sciences, has shown that investing in ECD will lead to the highest socio-economic return. For the upcoming post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals which will be endorsed in this September, Goal 4 states that we should “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Its Target 2 particularly specifies that “by 2030 ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education”. The Incheon Declaration adopted two months ago at the UNESCO World Education Forum further requires the global community to transform their early childhood systems to promote the sustainability of the future generation.

Even so, today we still have over 200 million children under 5 years worldwide at risk, 1/4 of the children living in poverty suffer from stunting. Our global community has long been focusing on helping children survive, but kids need to thrive. Every young child and his/her family should have access to quality care, nutrition, protection, and education since what children expose to during early years create trajectory across the lifespan.

Promoting the pathways to sustainability needs collaborative efforts. To travel this transformative journey with young children, we need to have good infrastructure from policy makers, quality programs and standards from service providers, play-based curriculum from teachers, professional development programs and opportunities from teacher educators, engagement from parents and awareness from community, and new findings and

innovation from researchers. This conference provides an incredible opportunity for knowledge sharing and idea generation to prepare us all to urge our governments and educational systems to implement the sustainability concepts in our home countries around the world and to empower people who work with children; in other words, to do what we need to do. We do not want our children to miss this important window of opportunity. Act now!

I wish all of you an enjoyable experience and a fruitful exchange and dialogue at the conference. And now I would like to present a special gift for all of you.