

Dear Dr. Choi, Dr. Lee, Dr. Gim, Prof. Park,  
Dear Honorable Speakers: Prof. Kagan, Prof. Odom, Professor Wales,  
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

안녕하세요! It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the OMEP 2016 World Conference. Today, we have more than 600 early childhood researchers, practitioners, policymakers, advocates, teacher trainers and future teachers coming from 45 different countries around the world. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and insight with us.

Returning to Korea has brought me a lot of special memories. Just slightly more than a year ago, the UNESCO hosted the World Education Forum in Incheon. I was there with Eunhye Park and Ingrid Pramling Samuelsson, advocated strongly for early childhood development to be included in the post-2015 global development agenda. Today, early childhood development is already one of the main target of the Sustainable Development Goals. As said by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: "The Sustainable Development Goals recognise that early childhood development can help drive the transformation we hope to achieve over the next 15 years."

Everyone at OMEP as well as all of you sitting here have spent tremendous effort in making the vital role of early childhood development recognized. Please, give yourself a big round of applause.

Now we have achieved a significant milestone, we need to ask ourselves, where do we go from here? What's next?

Recalling the Presidential Forum of the last World Conference in Washington DC, of which our Keynote Speaker today Prof. Sharon Lynn Kagan chaired, young children are still facing a lot of challenges today, including: 1. Challenges associated with attitudes and values; 2. Challenges associated with the broader global context; and 3. Challenges associated with the field of early childhood education.

We could have fixed the problems. However, in most countries, the field of early childhood is not a coherent system. Rather, it is highly fragmented. There are many funding streams, hundreds of small programs, and different regulations. It involves primary care providers, teachers, families, and communities. All of them have to work together in order to achieve effective and quality early childhood education.

We must situate early childhood education in a holistic context as well as respect the unique characteristics of young children to ensure they all develop their full potentials. We need innovations at the same time optimize the strengths we already have. Most importantly, we need to show the world that young children's holistic development and enhanced learning has a strong multiplier effect which can transform not only individuals but also societies. As the theme of this World Conference suggested, we need to transform our early childhood systems for our future generations. In fact, we need to start a revolution!

OMEP has already taken the initiative. Since 1948, we defend and promote the rights of the child to education and care worldwide and support activities which improve accessibility to higher quality early education and care. Today, we have almost 70 National Committees worldwide, representing five regions. We actively collaborate with other international and national organizations, including the United Nations, UNICEF, UNESCO and Red Cross. We all work towards one goal, that is, promoting the right to education and the welling of young children globally.

On behalf of the World Executive Committee, I would like to thank the conference planning committee OMEP Korea, all of the supporting agencies, sponsors and helpers who contributed the grants and their efforts during the conference preparation. This conference would not have been a success without you. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President of OMEP Korea Dr Eunhye Park, who was just elected yesterday to be the next World President. I very much believe she will continue the momentum and take OMEP up to a next height.

Last but not least, I would like to thank each of you for attending our conference and bringing your expertise to our gathering. You, as early childhood education leaders, have the vision, the knowledge, the means and the experience to help us pave our way into the future. Throughout this conference, I ask you to stay engaged, keep proactive and help us shape the future of early childhood. Let us continue here to share, learn, connect and collaborate, for building a stronger early childhood community.

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