

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

36th SEAMEO COUNCIL CONFERENCE

**The Pacific Sutera Hotel
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia
February 10-14, 2001**

Members of the Canadian Delegation:

The Honourable Drew Caldwell (Head of Delegation)
Minister of Education, Training and Youth
Manitoba

Mr. George Molloy
Director, International Programs and
Special Projects
CMEC

Mr. Nejat Gorica
Vice-President, Marketing and Development
ACCC

Mr. Richard Martin
Senior Program Manager
International Academic Relations Division
DFAIT

1. There were three separate meetings that took place during the course of the 36th SEAMEC – Special High Officials Meeting (February 10), In-Camera Session of Ministers (February 11), and the Ministerial Plenary Sessions (February 12-14). Summary records of these meetings have been prepared by the SEAMEO Secretariat and are available upon request through the CMEC Secretariat. Copies of documentation for these meetings are available from the CMEC Secretariat as well.
2. The Special High Officials Meeting was attended by Nejat Gorica and Richard Martin. The purpose of the meeting was to review the agenda and last minute details of the Ministerial meeting, scheduled to start on Monday, February 12. The discussion ended up focussing on two specific issues: the nomination of the new SEAMEO Secretariat Director and the review of the role of the organization in the 21st century.
3. The participants approved unanimously the recommendation to nominate Dr. Arief Sukadi Sadiman as the new Director of the SEAMEO Secretariat. Dr. Sadiman is currently the Director of the SEAMEO Regional Centre for Open Learning (SEAMOLEC), in Indonesia and will replace the current director, Dr. Suparak Racha-Intra, on June 1, 2001.
4. The Chair proceeded with a *tour de table* on SEAMEO's role in the 21st century. Countries recognized that changes needed to take place to make the organization more efficient and relevant. A number of suggestions were put on the table ranging from having SEAMEO playing a greater role in enhancing regional collaboration to providing better professional training and assisting developing countries meet the challenges of both ICTs and the globalization. Singapore proposed the idea of a workshop to discuss this issue in depth, which received the approval of all the participants. It was also agreed that such workshop should take place within 3 to 6 months after the 36th SEAMEO Council Conference, thus eliminating the possibility to hold such workshop at the time of the proposed 1st SEAMEO Education Congress, in Bangkok at the end of March 2001. Malaysia offered to host the workshop in October 2001.
5. The In-Camera Session of Ministers was attended by George Molloy and Nejat Gorica. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Yahya A. Muhaimin, minister of national education, Indonesia. The purpose of the meeting was to review a set of recommendations prepared by the high officials when they met in November 2000. Of particular note was the approval of the appointment of Dr. Arief S. Sadiman as SEAMEO Secretariat Director for the period from June 1, 2001, to May 31, 2004.

6. Following an address by Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, prime minister of Malaysia, the 36th SEAMEC Conference was officially opened. Dr. Musa Mohamad, minister of education, Malaysia, was elected Chair of SEAMEO for the coming year and Mr. Soursak Prisananuntagu, minister of education, Thailand, was elected Vice-Chair.
7. Prepared statements were made by heads of delegations. Copies of the texts are available from the CMEC Secretariat. George Molloy presented a statement on behalf of the Honourable Drew Caldwell who was en route and joined the ministers later in the day.
8. Of particular interest to Canadian education authorities was the attention drawn by the under-secretary of education in the Philippines to the interest of the new president in developing information technology as a cornerstone of her administration. The Philippines are, therefore, interested in cooperative endeavours with other countries in the field of information technology and education.
9. The comments made by the Minister of Education for Singapore, while also focusing on the importance and the impact of technology, drew attention to the need to re-think and strengthen SEAMEO's activities. Canadian authorities share his belief that SEAMEO, in order to stay relevant and focused, needs to chart new directions and improve the efficiency of the organization.
10. The tone and content of the Malaysian Prime Minister's address, and statements made by several of the SEAMEO member countries, reaffirmed the efforts in the region to strengthen organizational structure for facilitating cooperation among Southeast Asian countries. The continued reference to closer collaboration with ASEAN seems to underline this tendency.
11. Ministers received and approved:
 - the reports on assistance of Associate Members and Donor Countries:
 - Reports/proposals on financial matters.
 - Progress reports on plans/programs/projects.
 - Future plans/programs/projects.
12. As part of the conference, site visits were organized to the University Malaysia Sabah and three schools. The Honourable Drew Caldwell joined other ministers in planting a tree at the university on behalf of CMEC.

13. The meeting concluded with an invitation from education authorities in Thailand to hold the 37th Conference in Chiang Mai.

Observations

14. Very positive feedback regarding the 14th Commonwealth Ministers of Education Conference, especially the hosting by Canadian authorities, was provided by the ministers from Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia, and from the Singapore delegation. Repeated references were made in private conversation with delegates from these three countries to the potential for interconnections between the work of SEAMEO, APEC, and the Commonwealth.
15. Separate conversations with the delegation from Cambodia and Vietnam suggest that the potential exists for further cooperation with these countries, especially with respect to teacher/instructor training and the development of learning materials.
16. The potential also exists for Canadian authorities to build upon previous strategic/management work with the SEAMEO Secretariat as preparations are made for the workshop on SEAMEO's role in the 21st century. Canada's contributions in the past have been well received and Canadian expertise will be sought for the workshop.
17. Canada has made a significant investment in SEAMEO over the years and has had a lead role in developing strategic planning and administrative models for the Secretariat. Led by Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, a renewed effort (see note 9 above) is being made to keep the organization relevant to the needs of its members. As Singapore continues to push for renewal, Canada should invest in this effort, thus strengthening the "good partner" relationship that exists as an Associate Member.
18. While it is recognized that the content level of SEAMEO Ministers' meetings is low, Canada's presence at these yearly gatherings of ministers of education is extremely valuable on the political/protocol front, and lends credibility and support to the many institutional-level partnerships that exist between Canadian institutions and their SEAMEO counterparts. Formal ministerial contact is fundamentally important in the cultural context of Southeast Asia.
19. The timing of the SEAMEO review with the appointment of the new Director provides an excellent opportunity for Canada to contribute to the re-shaping of SEAMEO in the future. This role for Canada could be even more important as Asian authorities continue to reflect upon their relationship with the West and the changing roles of SEAMEO and ASEAN.