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# ASEM Conference on the Harmonization of Competency Standards

## Summary

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1. The **ASEM Conference on Harmonization of Competency Standards** was held in Bali, Indonesia, 18 – 19 November 2009. The Conference was chaired by Indonesia and was attended by experts/ officials in the field of labour and employment from 21 ASEM Partners: The ASEAN Secretariat, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, The European Commission, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, The Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Poland, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam, and also by 4 observers, namely ILO, GTZ, JICA and Inwent Germany. The Conference was co-sponsored by China, Cyprus, The European Commission, Germany, The Republic of Korea, The Netherlands, The Philippines, and Thailand.
2. In his Keynote Speech at the Opening Session, the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Mr. Muhaimin Iskandar highlighted the three steps towards harmonization; transparency; equivalency; and harmonization. He emphasized that harmonization does not entail uniformity and every country is entitled to determine its own competency standards and certification. He therefore hoped that the conference could produce a common perception on harmonization of competency standards which could be used as reference in future technical meetings.
3. The Indonesian ASEM SOM Leader, H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi, conveyed that Indonesia pays great attention to the issue of labour and was the first country in Asia to ratify the eight basic convention of the ILO. In the context of ASEM, Indonesia is committed to furthering cooperation in the field of labour and has hosted several initiatives, including the 2nd ASEM Labour and Employment

Ministers Conference, Bali, 2008. She called for ASEM Partners to show the same commitment and undertake similar initiatives.

4. Mr. Myung Rho Lee, Ministry of Labour of Korea stated that globalisation has increased migration of skilled manpower. However due to the difference of competency standards between Asia and Europe, there is a need to address the different qualification systems to meet skilled labour demand. On this note, the Conference could be used to promote mutual understanding, lay foundations to harmonize competency standards among nations and therefore serve as an incubator to prepare for the new economic world.
5. Ms. Sabine Boehmert of the European Commission said that the crisis has had severe impact on employment and social situation in many countries. Skills development and the reduction of mismatches is perceived as a major issue under already existing challenges such as globalization and the crisis will accentuate this need further. At the same time, skills development is considered as a major tool for sustainable recovery. EU has launched major initiatives in the field of skills development and matching of skills with labour market needs.
6. The Plenary Session chaired by Mrs. Tetty Ariyanto of Indonesia consisted of 3 (three) Agenda Items, which are as follows: Agenda Item 1: Matters Arising from ASEM Partners in Developing Competency Standards and Certification Scheme; Agenda Item 2: Comparing the “Regional Model Competency Standard” (RMCS) and the “Model of Occupational Skills Standards” (MOSS); and Agenda Item 3: A Framework for Harmonizing Competency Standards: Indonesian Proposal.
7. In her presentation, Mrs. Irene Isaac, Executive Director of the Qualification & Standards Office of the Technical Education & Skills Development Authority, explained that the Philippines are guided by quality assurances system, which puts great emphasis on competency standards in order to achieve effective work performances. She then gave examples of the various initiatives taken within the Asian region in developing competency standards, including in the ASEAN, APEC and ASEM forum.
8. Ms. Lucie Davoine, Policy Director, European Commission, underlined the importance of qualification recognition as it promotes further learning, improves matching skill supplies with market demands and help people to work and study abroad. She presented tools of the European Union such as the European Qualifications Framework and the Key Competences Framework.

9. Mr. Raymond Grannall, Regional Senior Adviser on Skills Development of the ILO, explained that in order to improve the level of harmonization of competency standards, ILO members should pursue active and effective promotion, cooperation, and communication in the fields of education and training. He later highlighted the importance of the Regional Model Competencies Standards for employment services in the future.
10. Mr. Sumarna F. Abdurrahman, Vice Chairman of Indonesian Professional Certification Authority, explained that the differences of competency certification and training scheme in Asia and Europe are frequent causes to the problem of achieving personal qualification recognition. This condition calls for the harmonization of competency standards. Indonesia on this note proposes a strategic meeting between ASEM partners to explore a framework for harmonization of competency that includes traceability, transparency, mutual recognition arrangement, notification and step toward harmonization.
11. The First Working Group was carried out under the theme “Current Issues in Developing Skills Recognition” and was coordinated by Ms. Kim Jin Sil, Human Resource Development Service of Korea Qualification and Question Making Unit. The panellists for this session are Mr. Tian Feng, Department of Vocational Capacity Building, Ministry of Human Resource and Social Security, China and Mr. Robbert Moree, Senior Advisor, Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment, the Netherlands.
12. In her presentation, Ms. Kim Jin Sil underlined the major issues in recognizing skills in ASEM, amongst others: difference in education, socio economic and language barriers, lack of jurisdiction of specific knowledge, skills recognition by developed countries, and labour market protectionism.
13. Mr. Tian Feng described the basic situation in the national qualification system in China. Since 1993 China has been in the reforming stage and has established a national vocational qualification systems that is compatible to international practice; standard oriented assessment; and vocational oriented. The target group for the system includes trainees, employees and graduates of various vocational training schools. Method of assessment includes theory tests and practical skill tests. China has established a legal system, management system, technical service and support system, quality assurance and quality supervision on national occupational skill testing.
14. Mr. Robbert Moree stated that skills recognition helps to adapt to changes in today's labour markets. By recognizing the skills of existing work forces, we can increase

adaptability to the dynamic labour markets. However skills recognition is difficult to apply, especially for migrant workers with different working, technical and educational backgrounds. In an effort to deal with such difficulties, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) program was initiated in the Netherlands after 2004.

15. The Second Working Group was done under the theme “Challenges and Opportunities in Harmonizing Competency Standards” and was coordinated by Ms. Monica Oels, Senior Advisor, BMAS, Germany. The Panellists for this session are Mr. Sandod Themsawanglert, Inspector-General, Department of Skills Development, Thailand and Mr. George Siekkeris, Senior Human Resources Officer, Human Resource Development Authority of Cyprus.
16. In her presentation, Ms. Monica Oels explained that in Germany there is an overlap in responsibilities for vocational education and training standards relevant for ASEM cooperation as it is split between several National Ministries, regional and local governments and their mandated institutions. She underscored the need to strengthen the role of social partners, the need to take into consideration informal education, and access to certified competences for the unemployed and persons with disabilities. ASEM meetings could also become a place for innovation and exchange about new qualifications for new jobs.
17. Mr. Sandod Themsawanglert emphasized on the challenges and opportunities in implementing skills recognition system in South East Asia, particularly in the ASEAN forum. The ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting has agreed to enhance skill recognition process in ASEAN project and the 1st phase is aimed to develop competency standards in certain occupations such as welder and poultry farm worker. Furthermore, ASEAN Tourism Ministers have also agreed to set up mutual recognition arrangements in several sectors.

18. Mr. George Siekkeris in his presentation pointed out that one of the major obstacles for people wanting to work and learn in another country and even in their own country is that their qualifications and competencies may not be accepted. To tackle obstacles of this kind, various innovative systems, methods, mechanisms and instruments are used by countries. He then presented the experiences that Cyprus and the EU have gone through in their effort to tackle such obstacles, such as development of competency based systems and the use of learning outcomes approach when defining and describing qualifications as well as transparency tools. He then made a brief presentation on the challenges and opportunities for ASEM in developing, managing, and coordinating the harmonization of competency standards, including response to the needs of individual and enterprises, the active involvement of all stake holders and the consideration of learning outcomes.
19. The Conference exchanged views and experience on the development of harmonization of competency standards in each other's ASEM Partner countries and the role of the government, non-governmental organisations, and employment experts in doing so. Based on the discussions, a number of initial conclusions can be drawn:
  - a. The Conference is a forum for sharing of experiences, knowledge, views and best practices. Through the meeting, ASEM Partners is able to achieve a better understanding of each other's conditions, policies and efforts in harmonization of competency standards and certification.
  - b. As the first meeting of its kind within the ASEM framework, this forum has received attention from countries interested in the development and harmonization of competency standards.
  - c. The participants agreed that the conference is not intended to achieve a uniform model of competency standards between ASEM Partners but rather to gain a common perception on the concept, principles, terminology and processes used in harmonization of competency standards.
  - d. There are different approaches taken to the harmonization of competency standards, not only between Asia and Europe but also within each region. The commonality that could clearly be seen is that each country is making efforts to increase the capacity of its workforce in the face of greater competition in the era of

globalization.

- e. ASEM Partners are willing to make an effort to strengthen cooperation, transparency and exchange of harmonization of competency standards.
  - f. A framework for harmonization of competency standards could be further discussed in future ASEM meetings as the initial reference document for future works.
20. The Conference also endorsed the following general recommendations to be submitted to the 3rd ASEM Labour and Employment Ministers Conference, to be held in the Netherlands, December 2010:
- a. Positive feedbacks given by ASEM Partners in the Conference is a good indication that this issue can be further pursued within the ASEM framework.
  - b. ASEM Partners should continue to work closely on this issue as a step towards cooperation in the harmonization of competency standards.
  - c. ASEM partners are called to disseminate the outcome of the conference to the relevant stakeholders in their respective countries.
  - d. For future undertakings, several initiatives need to be considered, including the setting up of a temporary common secretariat, working group, joint analysis, terminologies and research, and electronic communication.
  - e. Close cooperation between ASEM authorities responsible for employment, education and vocational training should be fostered.
21. At the Closing Session, the participants expressed their appreciation to the host for the excellent hospitality rendered by the people and authorities of Bali.
22. The Chair expressed his appreciation to the delegates for their active participation and valuable contributions to the discussion, and to further develop ASEM cooperation in labour and employment.