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An Opening Address by Choltis Dhirathiti, Ph.D., Director of The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED)

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It is my honor and privilege to attend this DAAD-RIHED Research Leadership Excellence Program here today, organized as part of the Horizon Southeast Asia Project, which aims at pushing the frontier of research and sustainability. On behalf of SEAMEO RIHED, I would like to express my gratitude to Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences for hosting and organizing this Research Leadership Excellence Program today and throughout this week, accommodating 15 participants from 7 countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and Timor Leste; comprising 12 universities altogether.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ASEAN, or Southeast Asian region, is a vast area with a population of over 680 million people and a projected combined GDP of roughly USD 3.9 trillion by 2030, according to projections made by many agencies - on track to becoming the world's fourth-largest economy. Yet, looking inside this space, we see diverse cultures not only among the 11 different countries but also great cultural diversity within each country itself. Most importantly, Southeast Asia is a region with what I would like to call "uneven and hybrid development": uneven in that we have different levels of economic development, and hybrid in the sense that catching-up economies aspire to find accelerated ways of developing faster,

which also includes the question of how to develop our higher education sector more rapidly.

This brings us to why we are here in Osnabrück today. Society expects universities to provide answers to many developmental questions. And the university, as one of the engines of change, requires Research Excellence to fulfill this mission. One of the missions of SEAMEO RIHED is to promote, support, and facilitate learning and sharing of knowledge and experiences through international collaborations such as this Horizon Southeast Asia Project.

Already, our learning and sharing of knowledge began yesterday during our city walk in the center of Osnabrück. Every university exists and operates within a specific context. In seeing churches, buildings and architecture, and business areas, Professor Peter Mayer and Alexander Kühnemund kindly guided us through the city's history, modern and contemporary changes, and helped us understand the challenges its residents face, and how innovation is contributing to changes in people's mindsets and behavior.

On behalf of all participants from Southeast Asia, I once again thank Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences and look forward to the productive engagements ahead: learning, networking, and building connections.