WELCOME

Frances Fister-Stoga, Director of Linguapax Asia (2004 - 2011)

As founder and director of Linguapax Asia, I would like to welcome everyone to the 2011 Symposium on "Literacy for Dialogue in Multilingual Societies." On the video screen you can see the library of the University of Warsaw, in the capital city of Poland, where I am researching the revitalization of Yiddish. 75% of Yiddish speakers were extinguished in the holocaust of World War II. The university library contains over twenty plaques written in various languages including Sanskrit, Esperanto, Japanese, Hebrew, as well as musical, mathematical , and chemical notation.

Not only do the plaques symbolize the need for multilingualism, but they also emphasize the need for written forms to preserve heritage and support oral transmission of language and culture. In 1188 B.C., Homer opens his famous epic, *The Odyssey,* with a call to the muse Mnemosyne or Memory to help him remember the words he will need to convey his story. We are thankful that somewhere in the past, a listener of the poem could not only remember what was recited, but saved it on a slate or on parchment.

However, in another sense, multilingualism means not only knowing various language systems, but being *multilingual* in *one* language: knowing both the spoken form as well as the visual form—be it written, transcribed, signed, or graphically presented. Multilingualism may also mean knowing the different registers of one language——the language of the digital world, for example. Our symposium today will explore these multiple areas of multilingualism.

Before beginning the day's events, Linguapax Asia would like to thank International Christian University for its assistance and hospitality. A special word of thanks to Dr. John Maher who has vigorously supported Linguapax Asia from its first conference at the United Nations University. We would like to thank all members of the Linguapax Asia team for their efforts. We would also like to thank all presenters for their time and their sharing of expertise.