

**Sixth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI)  
1-4 December 2009, Belém do Pará, Brazil**

**Opening Ceremony**

**Address by Mr Walter Hirche,  
President of the German Commission for UNESCO,  
Former Parliamentary State Secretary of the Environment, Germany  
on behalf of Ms Rita Süssmuth, Chairperson of CONFINTEA V (1997)**

Mr President of the Senate of Brazil,

Your Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands,

Ms Director-General of UNESCO,

Distinguished Ministers and Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honored to address this distinguished audience on behalf of Ms Rita Süssmuth. She was the Chairperson of CONFINTEA V and a Former President of the German Parliament. Ms Süssmuth deeply regrets that she could not come to Belém to formally open this conference today. She asked me to convey to you her greetings and best wishes for the success of CONFINTEA VI - the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Adult Education.

Twelve years ago, in July 1997, the international community came together for the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education, which was hosted by Germany in the beautiful city of Hamburg. At this landmark conference, the

representatives of governments, civil society and other partners adopted the “Hamburg Declaration” and the “Agenda for the Future”.

Both documents recognize adult learning and education as integral parts of lifelong and life-wide learning processes. They are indispensable tools to address global challenges in relation to democracy, conflict resolution, peace and human rights, respect for diversity, economic and environmental sustainability and workforce development. The role of adult learning in empowering women and men to participate in their individual, their communities’ and their societies’ development was clearly underscored.

Since 1997, however, the world has changed. Many of the phenomena shaping people’s lives twelve years ago have developed further. Globalization has expanded, offering a vast array of opportunities to some, but also creating new challenges, demands and barriers for others. We are all struggling to pursue our ways in new work environments and amidst new forms of social organization and communication. We are living in an era of enormous social and cultural change, of uncertainties and fears, of conflict and threats to our established political and educational order. On top of this, a global economic and financial crisis is putting some of our values as well as our economic systems into question.

More than ever, investment in learning and education is crucial in order to overcome the present crisis and to build a better, more peaceful, tolerant and sustainable future for everyone.

UNESCO is fully committed to adult learning and education – and hence to lifelong learning and sustainable human development – through its work in education and in its other areas of competence – culture, communication and information, natural and social sciences - and through the CONFINTEA series. Governments and civil society worldwide have actively engaged in the process towards this Sixth CONFINTEA Conference, by preparing national reports and participating in regional preparatory conferences. Now, governments and civil society have come together in Belém in order to share practice and policy and to develop a common framework and strategies and tools for the future.

Distinguished Ministers and Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Fellow Adult Educators and Learners,

The Former Chairperson asked me to tell you that she wholeheartedly supports the objectives of this CONFINTEA VI, namely to recognize the role of adult learning and education within lifelong learning and for sustainable development and, more than anything else, to come up with a framework for implementation in order to “move from rhetoric to action”.

In this spirit I would like to open this conference and to hand over the CONFINTEA baton to the participants of the Belém Conference, to elect the CONFINTEA VI chairperson and the other members of the conference bureau.

While looking forward to the discussions and deliberations of this conference, please allow me to wish us all success, sufficient inspiration and plenty of courage when formulating and adopting the framework which will help us to harness the power of adult learning for a viable future!

Thank you for your attention.