

Leading the Asia-Pacific Region: Contributing to the Common Good

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Introduction

May I add my welcome to all of you especially those who are here for the first time and to our new members from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, The University of Queensland and Universidad San Francisco de Quito.

It is by working together and contributing to the common task over time that the value of this network is realized. So, for those of you who are new, please take the time to get to know the rest of us. Feel free to question and to propose new ideas. And I ask all of you to make new members welcome and to speak to people you don't yet know.

I also want to add my thanks to our hosts, President Ono and Vice Provost Chandrashekar and his team from UBC, not only for their wonderful hospitality but even more for their inspiration to lead us tomorrow in a challenge and an opportunity to work on student mobility responses to the SDGs including a charter. I leave Professor Chandrashekar to describe the task to us and I wish to thank him for stepping up as the champion of this initiative. We have extended this meeting to a full two days so that UBC can make this leadership contribution.

As a resource, your program booklet includes a graphic of APRU's activities and the SDGs.

How we can increase the impact of APRU, its value to you as members and to the region? This is the main question for us over the next two days.

In a survey that many of you responded to before this meeting, you gave your main objectives for joining this meeting:

- 95% said to update your knowledge of the latest work and initiatives of APRU
- 70% said to network and meet colleagues
- 65% said to explore how your university can contribute towards building an SDG-focused student mobility program
- 40% said to learn about how APRU activities can relate to my work

I am not sure what to conclude from these results except that they all align with the overall objective of increasing impact.

New Stage, New Context

We are now at a new stage of implementing a new Strategic Plan approved at the Annual Presidents' Meeting last June. The Plan is also included in your program booklet and frames our work here today and tomorrow.

We are not only at a **new stage** in our development as a network. Every year that passes places us in a **new context** of increasing urgency and peril. We face abnormal challenges in abnormal times.

We know that we are in unprecedented crisis. Our scientists have told us that we have crossed many thresholds of irreversible climate change and, in the unlikely event that we can limit the rise in global temperature to under two degrees by the end of this century, the effects will still be catastrophic. Furthermore, this is not a future event. We are suffering the early effects right now.

The crisis has been summarized recently as follows:

“...more than half the carbon exhaled into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels has been emitted in just the past three decades. Which means we have done as much damage to the fate of the planet and its ability to sustain human life and civilization since Al Gore published his first book on climate than in all the centuries – all the millennia – that came before... ..we have now engineered as much ruin knowingly as we ever managed in ignorance”

“...there is already, right now, fully a third more carbon in the atmosphere than at any point in the last 800,000 years – perhaps as long as 15 million years. There were no humans then. The oceans were more than 100 feet higher.”¹

In brief, as far as the human species is concerned, we are now living on an alien planet; we exist in an environment where humans have never lived before. We have achieved this appalling result in the space of a single human life, basically since 1950.

For a long time we have struggled with issues of economic growth, inequality, access to resources including water and food, access to new technologies, political rights, health care, environmental protection, human security, managing recovery from extreme events, and so on.

Today, these issues are infused with the panic of survival. Survival of countries, of corporations, of elites, of cultures, of institutions, of species.

Elites are already selecting the winners and losers of climate change – which refugees will be accepted, whose land disappears under the sea without help, who gets life-saving drugs, billionaires are building survival houses in other people's countries while millions face losing their homes in extreme events, national budgets are spent on weapons or subsidizing fossil fuels rather than combatting climate change.

¹ p.4, David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth-A Story of the Future*, (London: Allen Lane) 2019.

In short, we have entered **the politics of the selective survival of the human species**.

APRU can make a significant difference

The challenges seem overwhelming.

Yet many of the solutions are now within reach. We know what to do.

We have probably passed the tipping point when the green economy is more efficient and profitable than the carbon economy.

We can realistically have the ambition not to adapt or mitigate but actually to reverse climate change.

This ambition must be underpinned by generating political will and by achieving scale in the many solutions that are already known or being developed.

As research universities, we can make a significant difference.

We are 51 universities with a reach into 18 economies around the Pacific, with more than two million students and around 200,000 faculty. You, our members, already do a lot to contribute to climate solutions. The challenge now is to work collectively to educate the last generation that has a chance to fix the planet and thereby both generate political will and implement the technical solutions at scale. These imperatives must permeate all we do.

As the difficulties of international cooperation increase and planetary crises intensify, APRU is more important as a cross-border, trans-Pacific platform for collaboration.

Strategic Plan

In this context, the new Strategic Plan sets out our priorities as:

1. Building global impact
2. Increasing APRU's value to members
3. Creating high-value partnerships
4. Generating the resources to achieve these priorities.

Annual Report

We can be proud about how far we have come. Our Annual Report gives an overview of the many activities and achievements of the past year.

The section on ***Shaping Higher Education in the Asia Pacific*** scopes the meetings of academic leaders and other multilateral activities with APRU brings your policy insights to the global higher education community.

Creating Global Student Leaders includes the conferences, competitions, and summer schools which engage students in key research and policy topics related to regional realities

including AI and social impact, leadership for social good, sustainable trade, mental health and global health ethics, disaster recovery, urbanization and sustainability.

In terms of our priority on the SDGs and climate change, we look forward to the launch next year of the MOOC 'Bending the Curve' by the UC system. I encourage your universities to take up this educational opportunity to have thousands of students around the region study the ways of keeping the Earth's temperature below two degrees so that they will be equipped to act in their own situations.

The section ***Asia-Pacific Challenges*** records a long list of achievements in our key areas of focus, all related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals as you can see from the graphic in your meeting booklet. Most are led by core groups of faculty members from our members, and four have faculty directors located in member universities: Keio, Oregon, Tohoku and USC.

Most of you are by now very familiar with these program areas:

- Asia-Pacific Women in Leadership
- Digital Economy
- Global Health Multi-hazards
- The Pacific Ocean
- Population Aging
- Sustainable Cities and Landscapes

We have also achieved significant results with an intensive program of research, consultation and policy development on **esports** with eleven founding members. We will soon partner with our three Hong Kong members on the Asia-Pacific Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystems to be held at the Science Park in Hong Kong, December 2 to 5.

The final part of the Annual Report focuses on ***International Public Policy*** and records some of the most significant collaborations and engagements with the UN, APEC, ADB and the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council. Most recently this cooperation has produced the *AI for Social Good* program with Google and UN ESCAP, and the APEC University Leaders' Forum in Santiago, Chile, on November 14, in partnership with The University of Chile and APEC.

All of these achievements owe a great deal to you, APRU's Senior International Leaders. You are the key actors and communicators between APRU initiatives and your presidents, your faculty and students. We appreciate all the work you do. We are committed to working with you and your colleagues to ensure your hard work has even more impact.

Our success is also due to our partner organisations such as Elsevier, UN ESCAP, Google, The New York Times, the Hinrich Foundation, Entangled Solutions and Our Hong Kong Foundation.

The Task of this Meeting

Now I turn to our task here in Vancouver at this 2019 meeting of Senior International Leaders. We are here to report, to evaluate, to propose new actions. In short, to implement the Strategic Plan in order to increase the impact of this organisation. This requires intellectual focus and draws on our long-term commitment to working together across the Asia-Pacific region.

There was a much-appreciated presentation at our Sustainable Cities Conference in Sydney last month by Dr Kate Bishop from UNSW. She summarized how networks best function using nine key points:

[Select]

1. A substantive issue or area that BINDS
2. Activities that MOTIVATE
3. Potential IMPACT(S) and outputs
4. Sources for RESOURCES
5. Being OPPORTUNISTIC
6. ...but GOALS clearly defined
7. Every group needs a CHAMPION
8. Then trade on your STRENGTHS
9. ...and NETWORK madly!

Throughout this meeting I hope you will network madly on clearly defined goals, offer to be champions out of your strengths and help us make a global impact.

This afternoon, after hearing reports from a range of programs, you will have the opportunity to propose ways to improve our performance in terms of the four priorities from our Plan: impact, value to members, partnerships and resources.

Towards the end of the afternoon, we will share some of the new initiatives that have emerged. We look for your strong support of them and for suggestions on next steps. These include:

- Sustainable Waste Management, led by Korea University
- The Mayors' Academy for Sustainable Urban Development, led by The University of Oregon and UN ESCAP
- HR Directors Network, led by the National University of Singapore
- Digital Skills Development with APEC, led by The University of the Philippines
- Indigenous Studies Network, led by The University of Melbourne
- Symposium on Haruki Murakami in International Literature, led by Waseda University

You will note that the Strategic Plan refers to building interdisciplinary platforms for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In preparation for UBC's leadership on developing an SDG program tomorrow, we will conclude the afternoon with some case studies on recent SDG-related programs that might usefully feed into this process.

The Future

I also want to share with you that we are already starting to think beyond the Strategic Plan. Because I believe that networks, and APRU in particular, have the potential and responsibility to deliver much greater value, we need to do the thinking and research that will equip us for the future. We are in the early stages but this may come forward as a third **impact report**.

The way that we have worked together to build an active community of interest which is contributing so much to the Asia-Pacific region makes me very optimistic about the future of APRU.

We have stewardship of the education of future generations, our institutions are at the forefront of understanding society as well as leading beneficial technological discovery. We have a great deal to contribute to the well-being of our societies and finding solutions to the many challenges confronting us. Let us demonstrate, by the commitments we make at this meeting, that we have the determination and imagination the task requires.