

Philippines

Raul S. Roco

Secretary (Minister) of Education



Born 26 October 1941, Raul S. Roco was graduated (AB) Bachelor of Arts, Magna cum Laude, 1960, and Bachelor of Laws (LLB), 1964, from San Beda College, Manila, Philippines. He went to University of Pennsylvania on a university fellowship for his Masters Comparative Law (LLM), 1974. He was president of the Integrated Bar of Philippines, the national association of lawyers. He was member of the House of Representatives (1987-1992) and of the Philippines Senate (1992-2001) where he was Chairman of the Education Committee. He is currently Secretary of the Department of Education..

Ensuring Access to Learning

Expanded access to basic education that addresses quality and equity remains a compelling pursuit. Poverty remains a threat for the poorest households and those at the margin. Thus, eleven years after the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, the Philippines remains vigilant in complying with this international commitment and in the Constitutional and statutory mandate for free, compulsory basic education.

As public schools opened this year, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports prohibited the collection of compulsory fees thereby implementing for the first time, free elementary and secondary education. As a result of the policy, enrolment rose by some 5% to 12% in various schools. Poor parents enrolled all their children at the same time while other parents transferred their children from the private, to the public schools.

But in the age of globalization, physical access to the schools is but one thrust. Access to information technologies and communications is the other gap we must bridge. The availability of learning opportunities through ITC is one influenced by the distribution of economic resources. In the Philippines, access to computers and the Internet is skewed towards schools in urban areas that have the infrastructure, and the supporting local funds, to support learning through high technologies. This inequity must be addressed at an international level. In today's world, there are no rich or poor countries, only knowledgeable or ignorant ones.

We look forward to a dynamic discussion on bridging this digital divide in the 46th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE). Even more important, the intellectual capital of the less developed countries must be preserved and optimized through technology. *SR*