

**Address by The Honourable Abraham Shek Lai-him, GBS, JP, *Honorary Fellow***

Council Chairman Professor Frederick Ma, President Professor Stephen Cheung, Members of the Council, Deans and Faculty Members, distinguished guests, students, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to speak on behalf of this year's Honorary Fellows. My fellow recipients are leaders who have made significant contributions to the field. I am privileged to be ranked among them. Mr Cheung Man-kwong, Dr Sanly Kam, Dr Michael Mak, Mr Francis Ngai and I are grateful to The Education University of Hong Kong for conferring this great honour on us.

We share the vision to build an intelligent, prosperous and caring society through education. As the adage goes, "Only those with profound knowledge and moral integrity should teach and set models." The public pins high hopes on The Education University of Hong Kong to cultivate professional and conscientious talent to shape and enlighten our future generations. That is why the five of us are humbled to be initiated into this big family with such a daunting mission.

The term "educate" in Chinese comprises two characters. The first denotes an adult wielding a stick at a child trying to master the counting rods. The second one is derived from another millennia-old pictogram featuring a mother giving birth. Traditionally, to educate was, in essence, to impart practical skills and physically nurture a child.

Hong Kong has long surpassed this stage of rudimentary education. Our government now invests over a quarter of its annual spending on education. Yet, there remains, to parrot the Financial Secretary, a lot of holes to plug.

One such big loophole is in inclusive education. I have made it a mission of my life to plug it. Because of my dual background in politics and business, I have been in a position to campaign for both public and private sector support for better educational provisions for students left behind in our otherwise story of success.

Excluding foreign domestic helpers, there are 264,000 ethnic minority residents in Hong Kong. Indians, Pakistanis and Nepalese alone account for over one per cent of the local population. The latest by-census figures released last month confirm that almost one in five ethnic minority individuals are living below the poverty line in our community. The situation has deteriorated over the years. South Asian children, in particular, have been falling through the cracks.

They receive little support and attention as they face language barriers and racial discrimination both on campus and outside schools. Many of them have suffered from bad grades and thus a dim prospect of integrating into the mainstream society. Local low-income groups, youths with disabilities and other underprivileged ones are trapped in a similar downward spiral. For them, social mobility is simply beyond reach.

Our fiscal reserves are expected to top \$1,092 billion by the end of this month. We as a society have never been in a better financial position to boost inclusive education. Teachers and schools should be much, much better equipped and empowered so that they can have the resources to do their job – to ensure that the neediest in our education system can get a reasonable head start.

This University and every one of us here will have a role to play in this noble cause. No efforts should be spared. No child should feel abandoned.

Thank you.