

**HKU Equal Opportunities Festival 2010**  
**Opening Speech by Mr. WK Lam**  
**Chairperson of EOC**

Professor Lee, Guests and Friends,

Thanks for inviting me back. This is homecoming for me.

HKU is the only University that hosts a regular Equal Opportunities Festival. We should justifiably be proud of that.

This year's theme is Cultural Diversity.

I am a movie buff, and I learned in the first instance the beauty of cultural diversity through movies. But Hollywood movies are also full of cultural distortions. So I subsequently make it up through reading. The habit of extensive reading leaves me a lasting impression on the beauty of other peoples and other cultures.

Appreciating diversity is the gateway to the elimination of discrimination. Discrimination begins with prejudices: pre-determined mindset about others, biased generalizations on the basis of gender, color of skin, disabilities, diseases, sex orientation, age, and religion, just to name the common ones.

Whenever we say "these women", we are ignoring the fact that the differences between the average individual women are probably no less than that between an average man and an average woman. This must be the same when we exclaim "these Americans" or "these post-80s". Often, these gross generalizations are casual and not even meant to be offending. But in them, they carry all our innate preconceptions and stereotyped prejudices against those categories of people whom we either do not have the decency of respect for or do not have sufficient understanding about.

We learn from anthropologists that we might all have come from

that great great grandmother Lucy, whose head bones were discovered in Ethiopia in the 1970s and who lived 3 million years ago. We might also have indeed come from that same tribe of East African homo sapiens who ventured outside the African steppes some 250,000 years ago and settled all over the planet. Each and every one of us is an individual human being, with our own charms, our own faults, our own beauties, and our own dark-sides. But the important point is that we are all part of this unique human race, unique in our ability to communicate, to think, and above all to create.

If we look back into our short history as a human race, we cannot escape the fact that progress has been made through cross fertilization of civilizations, through interactions of cultures, and through the broad acceptance and appreciation of diversity.

We are inevitably shaped by the environment we are in. We speak different languages, we eat different food, we tend to favor things we are familiar with. That is all natural. But what we need to remind ourselves from time to time is this sense of respect for others, as a race, as a culture, as an individual. Only through respect can we hope to eliminate discrimination. Indeed, what we do at the Equal Opportunities Commission is about building respect: respect for others irrespective of their differences.

Today's Festival will I hope go some way in achieving this aim, an aim that we so much need in this age of rapid globalization when the speed of technological advance far exceeds the capacity of the human mind to adjust to our own diversities.

Thank you.

6 March 2010