Speech by Prof Dato’ Dr Ho Sinn Chye
Vice Chancellor, Wawasan Open University
At 3rd Convocation Ceremony on 24 November 2012

(Session 1)

Salutations:

➢ Yang Amat Berbahagia Tun Dr Lim Keng Yaik,
  Chancellor of Wawasan Open University

➢ Yang Berhormat Senator Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon,
  Minister in the Prime Minister’s Department,
  President of Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia,
  and Pro-Chancellor of Wawasan Open University

➢ Yang Berbahagia Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap
  Chairman, Wawasan Education Foundation

➢ Yang Berbahagia Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan,
  Chairman, Board of Governors, Wawasan Open University

➢ Central Committee Members and representatives from Parti Gerakan

➢ Heads and Representatives from institutions of higher learning

➢ Distinguished Honorary Graduate Dato’ Seri (Dr) Chet Singh

➢ Graduates and their family

➢ Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

1. It gives me great pleasure to stand before you here this morning and deliver my
maiden address as Vice Chancellor of Wawasan Open University on the
occasion of the University’s third convocation ceremony. It seems like only
yesterday that we celebrated the convocation of our first batch of graduates – but
that milestone event took place in October 2010.

And here we are again, gathered for the 3rd time and we have just witnessed the
graduation of another batch of our Master’s students from this University. As we
share this momentous occasion together, I would like to take the opportunity to
also share with you the progress and some of the recent achievements of this University.

2. Before I come to that, let me on behalf of the entire WOU learning community congratulate Yang Berhormat Senator Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon on his appointment as the first Pro-Chancellor of WOU. The University is indeed privileged and honoured to have him as its Pro-Chancellor. Dr Koh is not only an outstanding academician, but also a dedicated and experienced statesman as many of you know. His leadership attributes and professional accomplishments speak volumes of the person, all of which place him in good stead to take on his added role as Pro-Chancellor of WOU.

3. Next I wish to also congratulate Dato’ Seri Chet Singh on his conferment of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, in recognition of his life-long dedicated service, stewardship and professional contributions to the development of the State of Penang, its community and this University.

4. Indeed, WOU is proud to be associated with two such distinguished leaders and dedicated public servants.

5. WOU offers all its programmes through four Schools – School of Business and Administration; School of Science and Technology; School of Education, Communications and Languages; and the School of Foundation and Liberal Studies. Postgraduate programmes are administered by our Centre for Graduate Studies.

6. This year the University has produced 365 graduates, comprising 100 graduates from the postgraduate programmes and 265 at the undergraduate level. We have just graduated 87 successful students from the Commonwealth Executive MBA (or CeMBA) and the Commonwealth Executive Master of Public Administration (CeMPA) programmes. The first batch of graduates for the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education programme will receive their scrolls in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} session of the ceremony this afternoon.
Ladies and Gentlemen

7. The presence of our graduates in this hall today bear testimony to the fact that by investing in higher education, coupled with sheer determination, hard work and proper time management, all working adults can eventually earn themselves a University qualification while still remaining in their respective jobs.

8. Of the 87 graduates who are with us this morning, 84 received their CeMBA and 3 their CeMPA degrees. Seventeen of them came in through WOU’s unique Open Entry admission channel and the remaining 70 through the Regular Entry channel.

They comprise 55 males and 32 females, ranging in age from 24 to 60 years. The majority, that is 38 graduates, are from the Regional Centre in Penang, 21 from Johor Bahru, 18 from Kuala Lumpur, 6 from Ipoh, three from Kota Bharu, and one from Bandar Utama.

9. The graduates of our CeMBA programme come from diverse occupational backgrounds that include technician, production supervisor, human resource officer, marketing executive, manager, doctor, engineer, pharmacist, lecturer, company vice-president, and director. As for the CeMPA graduates, they hold positions like lecturer and manager.

10. WOU shoulders the responsibility of training and equipping members of the workforce with up-to-date industry-relevant knowledge and skills. We answer the government’s call to produce more knowledge workers to meet the talent demand of our nation’s workforce. We have been doing this since this University rolled out its inaugural suite of 11 undergraduate programmes to 721 students in January 2007.

11. The University commenced its postgraduate teaching in 2008 with the introduction of the CeMBA and CeMPA programmes.
12. We have been offering the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education since July 2010, the MBA in Construction Management and the MBA in Manufacturing and Production Management from July 2011 onwards. And in July this year, WOU started the Master of Education, Post-Graduate Diploma in Business Administration as well as the entirely research-based Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy programmes in the area of arts and humanities. All these bring the total tally to nine (9) postgraduate programmes from WOU.

13. The University’s cache of industry-relevant programmes has steadily increased over the years to now 44. They cover a wide range of disciplines, such as liberal studies, psychology, banking, accounting, electronics, construction management, education, ICT, management, and corporate administration.

14. We are happy to report that 20 WOU programmes have already been fully accredited by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) while the rest have gained provisional accreditation until they produce their first batch of graduates. Thirteen (13) WOU programmes have also received recognition from the Public Service Department (or JPA) and we are confident that another 7 more programmes will be awarded similar recognition in early January 2013.

15. WOU introduces new programmes from time to time to address the changing employment trends and professional demand of the country. We are commencing the Bachelor of Management (Hons) with Psychology this coming January. We are also waiting to launch four new programmes in July 2013 in the areas of Mechatronics, Property and Facilities Management, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Human Resource Management.

16. In its mission to create more opportunities for learning, WOU is extending its role as a provider of quality higher education to a younger generation of students. We are now planning to offer on a full-time on-campus teaching mode, two undergraduate degree programmes, beginning in September next year in this main campus in Penang. Once we have obtained the necessary approval for on-campus teaching from the MQA and the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), two Bachelor of Business programmes will be offered by the School of Business
and Administration for a start - one in the area of Management and the other in Accounting. These programmes are geared for the young generation of school leavers.

17. On a wider platform, WOU together with representatives from four other institutions (MAHSA, OUM, AeU, USM) are also working closely with the MQA to develop an instrument to evaluate and recognise the informal learning attainment of prospective students. This is aimed at widening the entry channel for more Malaysian citizens, particularly those aspirants without the required formal education, to pursue further education at the Certificate, Diploma and Master level, in our institutions of higher learning.

18. As the people’s university, WOU strives continuously to connect with society and reach out to provide higher study opportunities to more Malaysians. To date more than 10,000 students have experienced the learning opportunities provided by WOU. On the average, about 4,000 students are enrolled in a wide range of courses in every semester. The students are well supported by the University’s well developed Internet based learning management system, face-to-face tutorials and counselling service, both in the main campus as well as in its regional centres located strategically in the country.

19. The University has established two new Regional Support Offices this year, one in Klang in June, and another in Subang in July. We believe that the Klang Valley is home to a big population of workers and professionals who need to regularly upgrade their knowledge and skills to remain professionally relevant and maintain a competitive edge at the modern workplace.

20. We are also happy that our Valued Partnership Programme (VPP) has proven to be an effective mechanism for the University to collaborate with and assist private sector companies in upgrading the knowledge and skills of their workforce. The response from the corporate sector has been encouraging. So far 53 companies have already signed up as VPP partners of WOU.
21. WOU is also gaining greater international recognition as a provider of quality tertiary education. During the recently concluded 26th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) held in Chiba, Japan, WOU was successful in winning 2 out of the 3 prizes in the Best Paper Awards category. We won both the gold and silver medals.

AAOU currently has a membership of 72 Open Distance Learning institutions. The majority of its members are from the Asian region while a few are from Europe. Some of these institutions such as Universitas Terbuka Indonesia and Indira Gandhi National Open University have active student populations in the millions. WOU is currently hosting and helming the AAOU Secretariat in Penang. The Vice-Chancellor is the President and our QA Manager, Dr. Andy Liew Teik Kooi, is the Secretary-General of the AAOU. Our term ends in December 2013.

22. WOU is also spearheading the next wave of knowledge sharing which involves the use of the so-called “Open Educational Resources” (OER). Towards this end, WOU hosted the inaugural Open Educational Resources Symposium for the Asian region in September this year. The Symposium which was partly funded by the International Development Research Centre or IDRC and coordinated by Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan was attended by more than 80 international delegates from over 20 countries. The aim of this Symposium was to give impetus to the OER movement in Asia.

23. Indeed, over the short span of 6 years since its establishment, WOU has built up a strong reputation for itself as a trusted provider of quality higher education. We received delightful news from the Ministry of Higher Education recently. We were informed that WOU has been accorded a Tier 5 or ‘excellent’ rating by the Ministry in the SETARA 2011 local university ranking exercise. No institution was accorded the highest Tier 6 ranking in this exercise.

SETARA is a biennially conducted evaluation exercise implemented by MOHE to assess the quality of teaching and learning at the undergraduate level by participating public and private Universities and University Colleges. This is in line
with MOHE's mission to transform Malaysia into a world class higher education hub.

To be ranked in the same “excellent” category and share the same limelight with long standing higher institutions like UM, USM, Monash, Nottingham, etc. is indeed an accomplishment that we in WOU should be proud of. It augurs well for the University which now has to ensure that the quality of its academic programmes, as well as management and student learning support services will continue to meet the high benchmark standards set by the Ministry.

24. It would not be out of place to say that WOU owes its high standing to its close adherence to stringent QA policies and SOPPs, and equally important the dedication and hard work put in by all staff members, students and stakeholders in the WOU community.

25. There are of course other factors driving WOU’s growth, now and into the future. Given that research is an important indicator of the stature of a university, WOU through its Institute of Research and Innovation has begun investing in research projects to encourage its academic staff to also undertake active research in selected fields. The outputs from these in-house funded projects will be known in 1-2 years’ time.

Ladies and Gentlemen

26. Before I conclude it is only fitting that I acknowledge the vision and work of the founding planners and architects who had conceived and aided in the birth of this University. Our deepest gratitude to Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia for its vision that led to the establishment of this University and for continuing to support the University until today.

I also wish to acknowledge the philanthropic and benevolent contributions of the family of the late Towkay Yeap Chor Ee for this lovely campus in Penang and Dato’ Seri Stephen Yeap in particular for his continued guidance and support as Chairman of the Wawasan Education Foundation.
The initial valuable support from the Government and the Albukhary Foundation is also remembered and hereby gratefully acknowledged.

I want to also record my appreciation to the Chairman and members of the Board of Governors for their close guidance and leadership in moving this University forward.

My grateful thanks also go to my two predecessors, former Vice-Chancellors Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan and Prof. Dato' Dr. Wong Tat Meng, who have laid a firm foundation and shaped Wawasan Open University into what it is today – a trusted provider of higher education to working adult learners, and hopefully in the near future, to younger learners as well.

27. Ladies and Gentlemen, in concluding let me once again congratulate Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon on his new role, and Dato’ Seri Chet Singh and our CeMBA and CeMPA graduates on their fine achievements. Congratulations to you, Ms Poh Boon Fong, an audiologist with Loh Guan Lye Specialists Centre, on winning the Tun Dr Lim Chong Eu Memorial Prize for best graduate at the postgraduate level. I was given to understand that your pursuit of the CeMBA programme at WOU had enhanced your knowledge of management, so much so that this had not gone unnoticed, and had in fact contributed to your promotion to Senior Manager in Business Support even before you completed your course. This is the kind of immediate returns or career rewards we hope all of our graduates would get.

28. To every graduate in this hall, today is your day – a day to remember, to celebrate and cherish. We share your joy. I hope you will at all times all become good ambassadors of this University, including at your workplace. For the quality of a University is often measured by the performance of graduates in their jobs. I wish you every success in your present career. You are most welcome to return and pursue further studies with WOU any time, whether it is for personal lifelong learning or professional advancement.
29. The spirit of WOU should continue to live on well after your graduation. I hope that all of you will become active members of the WOU Alumni Association and get involved in its activities. As alumni, you can still continue to play an important role in the life of the University, for instance by volunteering your time to provide career insights for students or assist in student recruitment or orientation. You can help the Association to reach out to assist present students in their education in the form of financial support and fund raising. As ambassadors for WOU, simply by speaking well of the University and providing word-of-mouth endorsements are appreciated, since they would enhance the visibility of the University.

30. Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Tun Chancellor for his gracious presence in this morning’s convocation ceremony and sincerely thank all our guests, graduates and their family for attending the event.

Thank you.