Statement by Dr. Gwang-Jo Kim  
Director, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education  
at the 44th SEAMEO Council Conference  
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1. I am greatly honored to represent UNESCO Bangkok at the 44th SEAMEO Council Conference (SEAMEC), and would like to thank Dato’ Dr Ahamad bin Sipon, Director of SEAMEO Secretariat, for inviting me here today. My colleague – Mr Hubert Gijzen – Director of UNESCO Jakarta, requested me to convey his apologies for not being able to attend this important event.

2. On behalf of UNESCO Bangkok, I would like to congratulate the Minister of Education of Thailand, Mr. Jurin Laksanawisit, and the Secretary of Education of the Philippines, Dr Jesli Lapus, on their election as President of the SEAMEO Council, and Vice-President, respectively.

3. SEAMEO and UNESCO relations date back to 1975 when the two organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding. This MOU was renewed last year, and UNESCO has since implemented many joint activities with SEAMEO – both with the Secretariat and with its different specialist centers. We are working together on EFA, ECCE, MLE, CLCs, and the literacy assessment within the context of the UN Literacy Decade.

4. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is the first of EFA’s six goals, yet it has been the most neglected for many years. UNESCO – along with UNICEF – has been providing ECCE support to SEAMEO member countries since 2006 – through its ECCE policy review – as well as through the Southeast Asia sub-regional dissemination seminar which UNESCO organized in 2008. One recommendation from that seminar was for UNESCO to further support policy-level research to strengthen the evidence base for improving the quality of ECCE policies and programmes.
5. It seems timely, therefore, to consider a SEAMEO center that focuses on ECCE. Such a center could facilitate systematic and regular exchange of ECCE experiences, knowledge and resources.

6. Also last year – for the first time ever – UNESCO-SEAMEO-ASEAN collaborated in bringing countries together at the “Reaching the Unreached: Meeting of Southeast Asian Countries to Achieve the EFA Goals Together by 2015”. And barely two weeks ago, SEAMEO supported the 12th APEID Conference in Bangkok, when the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2009 was also launched. UNESCO hopes for similar support of the 13th APEID Conference set to take place later this year in Hangzhou, China.

7. Despite our successful joint activities, a lot of work remains. For example, while the GMR recognized great progress for many EFA goals, it also said that key targets for 2015 will be missed if we keep our current trend. The report identified two challenges: governments’ failure to tackle inequality, and stagnant aid to education with many donors not meeting their commitments. These, together with global and national inequalities as well as gaps between the richest and poorest countries, result in Education for Some.

8. These challenges, of course, should not be a source of pessimism -- rather the contrary. If we are able to clearly identify and properly seize those opportunities, we will be able to mitigate some, if not most, of the challenges mentioned earlier. We have limited resources, so we need to be more efficient and make sure that education is relevant to the countries’ needs, of the best quality, accessible to all, and able to respond to the challenges we face today.

9. As the new Director of UNESCO Bangkok, I have a vision which revolves around “EFA and Beyond for Sustainable Development”. While my vision does not foresee any deviations from our long-established goals or a sudden shift in priorities,
it does recognize an urgent need to re-think – and re-adjust – our strategy. We must focus on a few major areas of education. We must also assist Member States in formulating policies that cushion the impact of the global economic crisis – especially for those most vulnerable.

10. The focus would be on teacher education, ICT in education, TVET, and higher education. UNESCO is strongly committed to teachers’ professional development and is particularly concerned about policies relating to their recruitment, deployment and retention in Member States.

11. UNESCO is also keen to assist Member States in harnessing ICT’s potential in order to achieve quality education for all in our region. Three areas that could be beneficial to Member States are (1) ICT as an education delivery medium for EFA; (2) ICT as a pedagogy-enabling tool; and (3) ICT as an effective and efficient education management tool.

12. In the face of rising global unemployment, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and higher education are other areas of our work that offer great potential. Our TVET activities focus on poverty reduction; access to employment by marginalized groups and the vocationalization of secondary education, among others. UNESCO’s higher education programme aims to set international standards, promote international cooperation and facilitate information-sharing among Member States.

13. These are just some of the areas in which UNESCO can contribute to the capacity development of Member States in an attempt to address the current economic crisis. But UNESCO cannot do it alone. It is therefore important that we all work together in implementing these initiatives to address global problems. Also, I pleased to note that our region is now considered a model in terms of coordinated work in reaching the unreached in education. Related to this – UNESCO Bangkok along with EFA partners – will be organizing a regional meeting of
national EFA coordinators where they will focus on “Strategic Planning towards Reaching the Unreached in Education and Meeting the EFA Goals by 2015.” I encourage the Education Ministers here present to send your representatives to this meeting

14. In closing, let me express my appreciation for the close relationship and the family spirit that exist between SEAMEO and UNESCO Bangkok, made easy by the fact that we share the same building. The meeting last year provided an excellent platform for information-sharing and interaction. Let us continue this excellent initiative.

15. Thank you all once again for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today.