Speech of Benja Chonlatanon, Ph.d., Executive Advisor in Special Education and Education for the Disadvantaged, Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC), Ministry of Education, Thailand during the opening of the workshop, 6 June 2005

Ladies and gentleman
Distinguished participants
New colleagues and friends,

On behalf of the Ministry of Education of the Royal Government of Thailand, I am very pleased on this occasion to welcome to Bangkok our visitors from Brunei, Cambodia and Viet Nam and to offer a special welcome and acknowledgement to our friends from Samoa, who has traveled the farthest to be with us this week.

We are honored to have you with us in Thailand on this occasion as we seek solutions to a fundamental challenge which we all face.

Education is a basic human right for all children, including children with disabilities. This right is mandated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education for All, the Dakar Framework for Action on Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals. Yet still it is clear today that we have a long road to travel to reach this basic right.

Barriers to the full participation of children with disabilities in education are many. Perceptions must be changed. Capacities must be built. Schools, facilities and
their teachers must be made friendly and welcoming to all. We must seek answers to the lingering questions of who? How many? Where and how?

All the countries represented here this week have taken important steps to include children with disabilities in their education policy, planning and implementation. Yet all of us come from very different contexts, very different experiences and we all play different, but important roles in the provision of education for children with disabilities. And we all have much to learn from each other.

This week we face the important task of sharing our experiences, learning from our differences and developing together a set of recommendations to inform our own countries and other countries throughout the region and world.

Therefore, it is my honour to be here to participate in this workshop, to give you my added heartfelt thanks for advancing the work in education for all and to encourage you all to think creatively, pro-actively and enthusiastically in the work which lies ahead. This is a great opportunity to build on the wealth of expertise within the region through this collaborative experience.

I hope over the course of the week, you will be able to experience a bit of the Thai culture and that we will have opportunity to learn from you.

Thank you.