Excellencies, colleagues, UNESCO and UNICEF friends,

I’m very grateful to the Government of Republic of Korea for hosting the very important conference...and also thankful to all the disguised participates here for everything that you do to improve the lives of children in your countries.

I still remember the day, vividly, when I met a 7 years old boy in the some village in some Asian country. He was small and had been never immunized except for polio vaccination, nor was enrolled in attending school. He said that there is neither doctor nor school in the village. Many VIP persons visited the village and promised many things, but nobody kept their promises. He said he really wished his sick younger sister could be treated by a qualified doctor, become properly nourished, receives pre-school education, and can go to school every day.
Like this boy, many children still miss out on vaccinations, good nutrition, pre-school education and other crucial early childhood services, and are denied to their rightful place in the classroom, just because they live in a remote, hard-to-reach community. Their experiences remind us of the lives behind the statistics, and of the work still to be done.

The 2011 Lancet Series on Early childhood Development calculated the economic effect of preschool enrolment. This is just one component of a comprehensive early childhood development agenda, but reducing the schooling gap can benefit US$ 10.6 billion just by increasing preschool enrolment to 25% in all low-income and middle-income countries. This is indeed one of the best returns on our investment.

We also know that children in the most disadvantaged quintiles of their societies, or live in the most poor areas are at the greatest risk of being deprived during the crucial early childhood period.
To mark the Executive Board in September, UNICEF Executive Director Anthony Lake remarked that “The children of today will be the employers and employees, the politicians and the voters, the producers and consumers of tomorrow. The future of humanity, indeed the future of our planet, depends on giving them the best possible start in life – quality health care, nutrition and education… clean water and sanitation… protection from violence, abuse and exploitation… and a decent standard of living.”

The benefits of investing in children go well beyond individual gains or moral responsibilities. Every child, in every society, has the right to a fair start in life. Investment in young children must be a cornerstone of all development agenda and polices. UNICEF is committing to promoting policy dialogue on the Early Childhood Care and Education in this Asia and Pacific Region. In the forthcoming South to South Cooperation for Child Rights in Asia and the Pacific High Level Meeting in New Delhi, the Early Childhood Care and Education is one of the most important agenda.
The imperative for universal early childhood care and education is clear.

Every child has the right to develop her or his fullest potential.

I truly want to fulfill my promise with the boy who I met in the remote village, not only for his sister, but also so all for him and other children.