Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am Tawara from the Embassy of Japan. Thank you everyone for joining this “Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators” here today. I would like to deliver a few words on behalf of my Embassy.

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of UNESCO Bangkok, and Mr. Sombat Suwanpitak, Secretary General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO and everyone else involved for their cooperation in organizing this “Regional Meeting”.

These days, there is a perception that Japanese schools are facing many problems such as lack of funding, untrustworthy teachers, less enthusiasm among children for study and sports and so on. Moreover, poor communication skills, fewer young people thinking of studying or working abroad and a declining work force are now a serious concern.

However, in the UNESCO Bangkok Office, which organized the meeting today, there are many highly motivated Japanese staff members, who are certainly an exceptionally valuable human resource.

For myself, there’s one thing in Japanese education that I have always been very proud of, that is the work of the elementary schools. In Japan, children from all regions can go to elementary school, where they learn how to “read, write and calculate” and are brought up with a conscious understanding the rules of society and the people through group activities and sports. I believe that this is something that we could be proud of.

Before coming to Thailand, I worked for the Ministry of Education in Japan. In my career, I worked for intellectual property policy planning and supporting research in universities. In other time I worked in the local government for regional development. However, I have never participated in the field of children’s education.

When I was a child, my school teachers often said to us that in this world, there are many children who haven’t been blessed and are not able to go to school, while you can make a lot of friends and play and study together in school. Please study hard and be grateful for what you have. This may have had some effect on me.

If we look back into the history of Japanese education, in the post-Edo era from 1800, the rapid popularity of “TERAKOYA”, schools which were built by local people for their children to attend, played important role. There were many Terakoya not only in the cities but also in agricultural villages. In 1880, there were approximately 15 thousand schools with around 60 students per school (between the ages of 7 to 10) studying how to “read, write and calculate” with samurai warrior, priests, doctors and merchants as their teachers.

Surprisingly, around 150 years ago in 1870, already approximately 50% of men and 15% of women could “read and write” which was certainly a result of the wide spread
In this manner, in Japan I believe that high literacy and school attendance rate, and high interest in education has been accumulated throughout Japan’s long history.

I think that EFA’s goal will not be easy to achieve. However, there is a vital need to accelerate progress towards the goal. As for this meeting, I hope that everyone will actively join in the discussion with this aim in mind.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude once again to all the participants in this meeting. Thank you.