13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators: The Big Push

26-27 February 2013, Bangkok

Opening Remarks on 26 February 2013 (9:00 – 9:10 am)

Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok

~ Mr. Sombat Suwanpitak, Secretary-General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO and our host for this meeting

~ His Excellency, Dr. Nath Bunroeun, the Secretary of State, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia

~ Mr Koji Tawara, Representative of the Ambassador of Japan to Thailand

~ Distinguished representatives from the Ministries of Education in Asia-Pacific

~ Representatives from our EFA partners, colleagues from UNICEF and UNESCO

~ Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning! Sawasdee krub

It is an honor for me to speak before you today and open the 13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators: The Big Push.
I wish to thank the Thai National Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Education Thailand for co-organizing this meeting and hosting the welcome reception tonight. It is also my pleasure to inform you that H.E. Mr. Phongthep Thepkanjana Thailand’s Minister of Education will join us during the dinner reception tonight. I also thank the Government of Japan for supporting this meeting through the Japanese –Funds-in Trust programme.

Allow me to give a **brief background about this meeting**. The regional EFA coordinators meetings have been organized by UNESCO Bangkok and its partners, including UNICEF since 2000. This was a direct response to the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000.

As most of you know, it was at this forum where National Governments and the international community re-affirmed their vision of Education for All through the Dakar Framework for Action.

This Framework committed signatories to the attainment of six goals with focus on early childhood care and education, universal primary education, life skills and life-long learning, adult literacy, gender parity and equality, and quality education, and the need for national monitoring of EFA progress.
The EFA goals were further linked to national and international development frameworks in September 2000 when 189 nations came together at the United Nations Millennium Summit. It was at this summit when the Millennium Declaration was endorsed. The Declaration set the eight Millennium Development Goals or MDGs.

Following the Dakar Forum, UNESCO Bangkok continued to support countries in the region, including through the holding of annual regional meetings of National EFA Coordinators. UNESCO also co-chairs with UNICEF, the Regional Thematic Working Group on EFA, or what we often refer to as TWG on EFA.

**Meeting objectives**

This year’s meeting has three specific but inter-related objectives. First is to set action points to accelerate progress towards the achievement of EFA, in very practical terms. Second, we need to become familiarized with the guidelines to conduct national EFA reviews. Findings will be shared at the 2015 End of Term meeting, which the Republic of Korea has agreed to host. Third, we hope for countries to discuss their perspectives regarding the role and nature of education after 2015. These inputs will be shared at the regional thematic consultation on education beyond 2015, which is held back to back with this meeting, from 28 Feb. to 1 March, at this hotel. Ultimately,
Asia-Pacific’s inputs will be shared at the global thematic consultation in March, in Dakar, Senegal.

The meeting agenda is structured into three parts: first is establishing where we are now and what can be done between now and 2015. Through the sub-regional and thematic group discussions, we will prioritize and develop practical Action Points that clearly indicate how remaining issues in EFA are to be addressed. We will also have the opportunity to hear about effective practices during the case presentations session.

The second day of the meeting is focused on the national EFA reviews and the role of education after 2015. The National EFA Reviews discussions will focus on the concept, processes and strategies in conducting national EFA reviews. We will discuss what the region can do together to mark the end of EFA term in 2015. A review is important at a time when we conclude this quarter-century EFA endeavor.

At the same time, we must already think about the role of education after 2015. There will be a panel discussion on this topic during the second day.

Let us remind ourselves that Asia and the Pacific is where EFA was born. Asia and the Pacific is also where the conclusion of EFA will be reported, and where a new global education agenda will be adopted. We can once again
take it upon ourselves to be forward looking and help set the stage and processes for education beyond 2015. At the same time, we need to consider emerging trends in education today. For instance, transnational migration and borderless issues due to migration urge us to look at and treat education from a different perspective.

Throughout the region, there is unprecedented recognition of the crucial role of education for addressing development challenges. The recent launch of the UN Secretary General’s “Education First” initiative has further enhanced the region’s recognition of the powerful facilitating role of education in development. There is mounting pressure on schools to perform and produce better results in terms of student learning. A new awareness is emerging of the need to place “learning” at the heart of education to focus on developing cognitive capacities as well as on building character. The importance of early years in shaping these capacities is gaining greater recognition in the region. Beyond EFA and its deadline, there is heightened interest in the road map for post-2015 period and moving towards a unified vision for education taking into account the unfinished agenda as well as new realities and trends.

I want us to put our heads together and think creatively what activities and processes we, countries and EFA partners, need to implement starting now to 2015. In an environment of scarce resources, partnerships and joint
actions, complemented with effective coordination are imperative for successful outcomes.

The outcomes of this session will be shared and discussed at the next meeting of the TWG on EFA. I will also personally take it up at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. I urge our UNICEF colleagues and other EFA partners to do the same for their respective headquarters.

Accelerating EFA progress

Even as we look to 2015 and a post-2015 agenda, I would like to emphasize the urgency for all of us to work together between now and 2015. The most critical thing for us to do is to speed-up EFA progress so we can meet the goals by the committed date.

May I stress that doing the same thing as we have been doing for the past 10 years will not get us there! We need renewed vigor and strong political commitment between now and 2015. We need targeted interventions supported by appropriate policies and efficient use of resources.

EFA is for developed and developing countries

Because of the universality of EFA, focus is not on LDCs only, but instead, on all countries. Indeed, each country in the region, regardless of the level of
economic development, faces a specific challenge to education. Donors in education such as Japan and the Republic of Korea have recognized from their own development experience, the vital contributions of education to a country’s social and economic development. Having both Japan and the Republic of Korea at this meeting carries great symbolism. It highlights the fact that **EFA applies to both developed and developing countries alike.** At the same time, there are many emerging middle income economies in the region and we look forward to working together with them.

We have a moral responsibility to carry on the torch for EFA. We have to ensure that the vision of Jomtien, which was further refined in Dakar, will be fulfilled. Let us be prepared for the next global conference to set the post-2015 education agenda that will take place yet again in this region in 2015.

All of you here, in your capacity as Education officials and as representatives of organizations working on education, have the power to give a better future to every child and learner. It is after all, each of you, who will do the necessary work in your countries to implement policies, to collect data towards reaching Education for All.

I urge you to be agents for EFA acceleration. Be the voice of the marginalized and advocate for their inclusion.
In closing, I would like to reiterate UNESCO’s continued support for countries in the region as you work toward the realization of the goals of Education for All. We remain your close partner, ally and supporter both at the national and regional levels.

I thank once again, the Thai National Commission for UNESCO and the Ministry of Education of Thailand, and the Government of Japan.

I also wish to thank all of you for traveling all the way to Bangkok to participate in this meeting.

I look forward to fruitful discussions during the next two days. I encourage all of you to make the most of this meeting. Share your experiences and learn from each other. With less than 3 years to the target EFA year, let us work together with renewed urgency and vigor towards the achievement of Education for All!

Thank you.

Kop khun krub.