Welcome Address
by
Dr. Sombat Suwanpitak, Deputy Permanent Secretary and Secretary-General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO at the 13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators: The Big Push on 26 February 2013 at 9.10 am
The Imperial Queen’s Park Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand

Excellencies,
Dr. Gwang-jo Kim, Director of UNESCO Bangkok,
Distinguished National EFA Coordinators,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to be part of this gathering of the opening ceremony of the 13th Regional Meeting of National Education for All (EFA) Coordinators: The Big Push. May I begin by expressing my deep appreciation to UNESCO Bangkok in joining hands with the Thai National Commission for UNESCO to convene this Meeting to ensure accelerated progress towards EFA goals by 2015. We all here are well aware that only less than three years when the world community will reach the year 2015 where we set the goals of the EFA achievements.

Since the World Conference of Education in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the Ministry of Education, Thailand has continuously cooperated with UNESCO and the Japanese Funds-in-Trust, and the international community in supporting global agenda which underlined the right of all people to education and our obligation to meet basic learning needs. In the year 2000, international community adopted the six EFA goals and the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the two most important frameworks in the field of education. These two sets of goals are ambitious roadmaps
for the global community to follow. They offer a long-term vision of reduced poverty, gender equality, better health, provision of education and sustainable development.

In this regard, Thailand supports UNESCO’s role in being the lead agency in EFA activities. With this role, UNESCO would be able to jointly work with other UN agencies by spurring a global movement to provide quality, relevant and inclusive education for all, as well as education related MDGs.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While countries around the world, including the Asia-Pacific, have embraced the need for education to achieve sustainability, some significant challenges remain. There are vast disparities between and within countries as concerns access to schooling, equity and quality of education and in resulting of learning achievement. Despite considerable progress to improve youth and adult literacy, the region still contains the largest number of illiterate adults of any region in the world.

In light of this, regional cooperation helps us to improve our strategies and plans to meet EFA goals and leads to wider quality improvements of education across the region. At this very particular moment in time, we must continue to be committed to working together to ensure we are meeting the needs of our citizens and are successfully identifying the remaining gaps and bottlenecks affecting progress towards the EFA goals. All countries in the region should cooperate and learn from each other. Cooperation, collaboration and mutual assistance will help us to achieve both our national, regional and global EFA goals.

Thailand, like many other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, gives strong emphasis to ensure a more equitable distribution of educational resources. As such, people of all ages and backgrounds, including the
disadvantaged, will have access to educational services and resources throughout life and equal opportunities to realize their full potential and prosper. Reaching out to adults and out-of-school youth in all provinces and communities nationwide is also a challenge of Thailand. With support from UNESCO, Thailand has established a strong network of Community Learning Centres (CLCs) under the Office of Non Formal and Informal Education. These centres have an important role to play in promoting literacy and raising literacy levels as the foundations for lifelong learning.

As member of EFA Steering Committee, Thailand is very pleased to co-host this important meeting, aiming at improving the overall quality of education through innovative approaches and maximizing on partnerships for effective EFA acceleration interventions.

Before we begin our deliberations, I would like once again to express my sincere appreciation to you all for making this meeting possible. I am sure the discussions here today and tomorrow will strengthen the relationship between regional EFA coordinators and I have every reason to believe that in the coming years the outcomes of collaboration on EFA's Big Push will give us to quality education for all to our children. Once again, may I welcome the distinguished delegates and resource persons to this important meeting and wish you a pleasant and productive stay in Thailand.

Thank you.