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*Proposed speaking points: Welcome Remarks*  
EFA Coordinators Meeting  

November 18th, 2010

Special acknowledgement and welcome to:

- Mr. Sombat Suwanpitak, the Secretary-General of the Thailand National Commission for UNESCO
- H.E. Dr. Nath Bunroeun, the Secretary of State of Cambodia
- Mr. Boris Kubaev, the Vice Minister of Education of Kyrgyzstan
- and distinguished representatives from Ministries of Education of countries in the region

- Gwang-Jo Kim (Director of UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau), Olav Seim (UNESCO EFA International Coordination Team) and UNESCO colleagues from Paris, Montreal, Bangkok and across the region
- UNICEF colleagues from the Regional Office for South Asia and from country offices throughout East Asia and the Pacific
- EFA Partners – representing international agencies and civil society organizations

On behalf of UNICEF and the Regional Office of East Asia and the Pacific, welcome to this annual meeting of EFA Coordinators of the Asia Pacific region. The next three days is an important opportunity to establish key steps forward in the realization of goals of Education for All by 2015. As the principal agency for children, UNICEF is honored to be your close partner and ally in this endeavor, both at the national and regional level.

Every child has a right to education, a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of 1948 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A child’s right to enjoy quality learning opportunities should not be a privilege enjoyed by a few, based on background or circumstances; regardless of family wealth, gender, ethnicity, language or disability, all children have the right to enjoy opportunities to learn and develop to their fullest potential. Governments and families bear the duty to respect, protect and fulfill this basic right for all children.

The right to education is also inextricably linked to the realization of other fundamental human rights, and by extension, to the improvement of quality of life and well being of nations. It is one of the best means to breaking the cycle of poverty.
Since our collective commitment for EFA made in Jomtien in 1990, the Asia Pacific region has made notable progress in a number of fronts, ensuring that more children survive, develop and thrive, with better chances of reaching their full potential. We applaud the efforts of countries whose vision and commitment has made such progress possible.

Nonetheless, much more work remains. Despite significant progress in advancing the education agenda, pockets of disparities remain persistent in many countries. Overall access and quality improvements have benefited some, while excluding others, particularly the poor and vulnerable children. For ex: in Vietnam, children from the poorest quintile are 40% less likely to reach Grade 9 than those from the wealthiest; In Indonesia, rural children are 20% less likely to reach Grade 7 as are children living in urban areas, while in Timor Leste, this gap reaches nearly 40%; Marginalization by caste, ethnicity and religion can also be observed, as in the case of Nepal where marked differences exist in the rate of primary school attendance among different groups.

We need to turn the tide. Without reaching the marginalized, Education for All and MDGs cannot be achieved. And as world leaders gather again for the High Level Group on EFA in Jomtien next March, urgency of these tasks will be evident. In two recent flagship publications of UNICEF- “Narrowing the Gaps to meet the MDGs” and “Progress for Children: Achieving the MDGs with Equity” – data and modeling suggest that prioritizing the poorest and most marginalized communities is pivotal not only in achieving the MDGs, but is also a strategically sound approach and cost-effective investment for nations.

We need to improve and accelerate our efforts to address the root causes of marginalization. Deprivations that begin early in the life of a child who has no access to quality care and development must be addressed, so that their negative, irreversible impacts on the child’s lifetime can be prevented. More children need to get into school and stay in schools of quality- schools that are child-centered and that effectively dismantles barriers that hinder genuine opportunities to learning, whether it is differences in language, gender-based discriminations and practices, opportunity costs
to learning, etc. Beyond education, the most basic social safety nets for families must be protected with robust social protection policies that respond to the various forces that affect the daily choices and lives of families.

With renewed commitment to focus on equity, UNICEF will continue to be your staunch supporter in the effort to reaching the unreached. To name a few initiatives: The global Out of School Children Study, in partnership with UIS- will help identify who remain excluded from learning opportunities and why; promoting alternative delivery models and programs – identify and deliver effective interventions that provide quality and relevant learning opportunities to those marginalized in traditional classrooms; mother tongue based multilingual education- continued action research and policy analysis will help build critical evidence-base for effective learning for marginalized ethnic minorities.

Finally, I am pleased to share that the newly endorsed Beijing Declaration for South-South Cooperation for Child Rights, signed by 28 countries in the Asia Pacific Region, reaffirmed the commitment to strengthened cooperation for rights, protection and welfare of children and achieving MDGs with equity. I look forward to the week’s discussions on the progress, gaps and priorities for reaching the six goals of EFA, which will aid in the articulation of the region’s End Decade Notes for EFA. Barriers faced by the unreached are real but not impossible to tackle. Sustained political will and effective policies based on critical evidence can steer us towards reaching the goals of EFA. We applaud the impressive progress countries are making and look forward to working together in our common endeavour of reaching the marginalized and meeting the targets for 2015 and beyond.