Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

It’s a real pleasure and honour to be with you today and to have this opportunity to make a brief speech on behalf of the UNICEF Regional Director for East Asia and the Pacific and on behalf of the other two Regional Offices that cover Asia.

First of all, many thanks to the Royal Thai Government for hosting this landmark meeting and for the enduring leadership in prioritizing investments in education. And thanks for all of you in attendance who continue to contribute to the body of knowledge that will enable the world community to accelerate education development.

Knowing that investment in education is foundational to human and social development, UNICEF has been working closely with your governments in our common pursuit of the MDGs and EFA goals over the years. We have seen tremendous progress with many countries on track for both sets of goals. We are also very mindful that the job remains unfinished in many countries and within countries where children still lack access to education and many fail to complete education with meaningful learning outcomes.

The challenge before us is therefore twofold: firstly, to help countries which still lag behind to catch up on the goals that they are currently committed to and accelerate progress where needed; and, secondly, to work with our key partners like UNESCO, other multilaterals and bilateral and civil society to set and address the new post-2015 agenda. In that sense, this meeting is crucial and timely.

Going forward I wish to highlight four things: one, the critical importance of focusing on learning outcomes – not just numeracy and literacy – but underlining the emphasis on lifelong learning and global citizenship; two, UNICEF welcomes the broader education agenda centred around one set of targets agreed in various fora, including Muscat; three, that we need to entrench the foundational focus on early childhood education; and finally, that we need to address the major bottlenecks that keep children and youth from schools (including poverty, remoteness, disability, gender, ethnic minority issues and conflict and disasters.

As we think forward on our collective commitments for the next decade, you can be assured of UNICEF’s continued support to the education agenda in Asia and the Pacific.