Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference
Bangkok, Thailand
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OPENING REMARKS
Opening Session, 6 August 2014 at 9:00 – 9:40 a.m., Ballroom I & II

Excellencies

Ministers

Distinguished guests...

Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning and welcome to the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference, the first regional meeting in preparation for the World Education Forum.

Let us remind ourselves that Education for All began in our region, and will conclude in our region, Asia-Pacific.

Thus, convening this conference is an imperative.

Thank you to Thailand, the Ministry of Education, for graciously hosting this important event and for the hospitality.

Thank you to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, the Ministry of Education, Republic of Korea, and UNICEF for their continued support.
May I give special thanks to Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO for his guidance and leadership.

Unlike previous meetings and conferences, this Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference will set the stage for education beyond 2015.

Over the next three days, ministers, high-level officials of ministries of education, experts and representatives of CSOs, development partners and academia will discuss issues, challenges and priorities for education beyond 2015.

We will refer to the national EFA reviews, a historic exercise completed recently in which the entire region participated to review EFA progress and analyse enabling and constraining factors.

And collectively, we, the Asia-Pacific region, will reflect on the Muscat Agreement that has defined global targets for education and develop regional recommendations for the international framework for action, to be adopted at the World Education Forum in Incheon, Republic of Korea in 2015.

As we conclude EFA and prepare for our new journey in education, now is the time for the region to speak out and have our voice included in the global education agenda beyond 2015.

We recognize of course, that the EFA agenda and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are unlikely to be achieved by 2015, and acknowledge the continued relevance of the EFA agenda.

We must ensure that what we have yet to achieve today, must be brought forth tomorrow with even more commitment and cooperation.

Our role in influencing this new education agenda is critical.

And our collective efforts will be well featured.
Ladies and gentlemen

Education is no longer a national agenda, but rather, a transnational agenda.

Education is our collective responsibility.

As reaffirmed in the Muscat Agreement, education is a fundamental human right for every person.

Education is an essential condition for human fulfilment, peace, sustainable development, economic growth, decent work, gender equality and responsible global citizenship.

Education contributes to the reduction of inequalities and the eradication of poverty, thereby establishing the right conditions that give rise to just, inclusive and sustainable societies.

And therefore, education must be placed at the heart of the global development agenda and of course at the heart of national development.

In quoting the Muscat Agreement, the post-2015 education agenda should be clearly defined, aspirational, transformative, balanced and holistic, and an integral part of the broader international development framework. It should be universal agenda.

During these three days, let us reflect on our past EFA achievements, lessons learned and remaining challenges, and let us focus on the seven targets proposed by the Muscat Agreement, taking into account the sustainable development goals as proposed by the Open Working Group.
I encourage you to work towards a rights-based and flexible post-2015 education agenda that accommodates diversity in governance structures;

That reflects a perspective based on equity and inclusion;
That takes into account the expansion of basic education;
That integrates lifelong learning approaches;
That ensures gender equality;

And addresses the need to overcome all forms of discrimination in and through education.

The Asia-Pacific stretches across a vast geographical area, rich with history, and diverse in cultures where 3,500 languages are spoken.

4.3 billion people around the world call Asia-Pacific home.

This is more than half of the world’s population.

But in our rapidly changing world, technological advances have brought us closer.

We are more connected than ever.

In this vein, let us continue to promote sustainable development and active and effective global and local citizenship, contribute to strengthening democracy and peace, and foster respect for cultural and linguistic diversity.

One of the most diverse and dynamic regions, education is very critical to our development. That is why we gather here today.

Now, let me turn to the structure and process of the conference. As you may know, the conference will be conducted in two segments.

The first segment is the Regional Dialogue on EFA and Beyond (6-7 August 2014).
During this segment, high-level officials of ministries of education and representatives of CSOs and development partners will review EFA progress and discuss issues, challenges and priorities for education post-2015, which will feed into the draft outcome document to be adopted by ministers on 8 August 2014.

The second segment is the Ministerial Forum on Education Beyond 2015 (7 August 2014 evening and 8 August 2014).

There will be a ministerial roundtable discussion and the presentation and adoption of the outcome document of the Conference.

Through these discussions and debates, I hope we will be able to convert the targets into concrete actions.

The process to determine post-2015 education goals, targets and strategies will culminate at the World Education Forum 2015, in Incheon, Republic of Korea.

An international framework for action for education 2015-2030 will be adopted.

And finally, the post-2015 sustainable development goals will be adopted at the UN Summit to be held in New York in September 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Once again, welcome to the Asia-Pacific Regional Education Conference.

I look forward to our fruitful discussions and debates, and to working with you over the next three days as we prepare for the education of our future.

Thank you.