Comments by Maria Lourdes A. Khan, ASPBAE Secretary General
Plenary 4 on the Framework of Action for the Post 2015 Agenda
Asia Pacific Regional Education Conference (APREC), August 6-8, 2014, Bangkok

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in this panel and participate in discussions shaping a new Framework of Action.

Let me begin with stating our understanding of a basic premise regarding this Framework of Action which we feel bears underscoring. In our understanding this represents the implementation strategies and mechanisms of the post 2015 education agenda which will be approved at the World Education Forum in Korea in May 2015. As such it is defined with respect to the post 2015 agenda agreed by the broader education constituency which stands on its own. Through our active lobbying we hope and expect this will also be adopted fully as an integral part of the global development agenda in September 2015. We congratulate UNESCO, UNICEF, for the strong alignment in unities coming out of these two processes so far.

We believe the crafting of the new Framework should build on the strengths of EFA, and harness the rich lessons derived from the more than 2 decade-long EFA process. We are evidently not starting from scratch – so we need to build on and develop from where we currently stand.

The EFA architecture was built in the spirit of multilateralism – building broad consensus, ownership and concerted action among all member states of UNESCO from richer and poorer countries, international partners and stakeholders including civil society. We believe this should be maintained. We believe it has been beneficial to have a global architecture to advance a global agenda. The current global architecture is just recently revamped after an extensive process of review, attempting to address several challenges of coordination, accountability, wider-based monitoring, a desire for greater exchange, capacity-building and stronger advocacy. We believe the elements of the architecture that came out of this review are solid foundations to build on:

- The notion of a High level formation convened periodically to mobilize high-level political support for EFA and in the words of the Dakar Framework, as “a lever for
political commitment and technical and financial resource mobilization” remains relevant for the future Framework of Action.

- Convening a periodic global meeting as an arena to jointly appraise progress and define tangible actions for follow-up continues to make sense. This meeting should continue be informed by the an independent global report such as the Global Monitoring Report which we think should be maintained but complemented more strongly by regional reports that draw from national reports.

- Having a smaller global formation that provides strategic guidance on all aspects of the new agenda such as in monitoring, advocacy, capacity-support, partnerships and financing such as in the functioning of the current EFA Steering Committee remains relevant.

- A strong feature in these two formations described that should be retained would be broad-based participation of all the EFA partners most especially member states, whose representatives are selected in a participatory manner along the UNESCO regional electoral groups. These representatives inform the debates with the collective views and perspectives of the cluster of countries they represent – facilitating better accountability.

- One important part of this global architecture - the UNESCO Collective Consultation of NGOs on EFA - has been particularly effective in institutionalizing civil society participation in the important global EFA policy processes. This mechanism, steered by NGOs in close cooperation with UNESCO, has contributed to the deepening of country-level CSO work, analysis and initiative on the one hand; and on the other, built in measures for national level perspectives to meaningfully inform regional and global debates.

Nonetheless, the new architecture will need to accommodate changes to be better positioned to advance the new education agenda.

- Since the new education agenda is envisaged to be ‘universal’ – applicable to all countries - one obvious change would be in the participation of developed country governments whose engagement earlier has been limited to development cooperation in education, not on education per se. The new agenda would need the buy-in and support of Ministries of Education, alongside Ministries of Development Cooperation in developed countries for its full realization. Further, the wider agenda for lifelong learning demands a shift from an almost sole focus of involvement by Ministries of Education in all countries – needing involvement of the Ministries of Labor, Finance, Environment, Women, Health, as examples.
The new architecture should be cognizant of this and/or build capacities to enable this. ILO must perhaps come in as a convening agency along with the current partners.

- The new education agenda calls for a stronger thrust in the adaptation of global targets and indicator development at the country level that reflect specific country priorities and contexts. Support for, tracking and coordination given this new approach will require a stronger mechanism at the regional level than has been available so far. The Asia Pacific has a stronger base to start from in this respect – with a fairly developed regional EFA mechanism. This can be further strengthened as sites for capacity-building, coordination, monitoring and advocacy.

- The gap between the broader EFA agenda advanced by the global EFA movement vs. the much narrower financing agenda promoted by the only existing financing mechanism for EFA, the Global Partnerships for Education needs to be bridged in the post 2015 era. Further, modalities of the new financing arrangement should enhance the role of developing country governments in a manner where they are truly in the driving seat in setting their sector priorities within the broad Post 2015 education agenda and education ODA offering a harmonized response to these national education sector plans.

- And finally on civil society participation, notwithstanding the strong commitment UNESCO has demonstrated for CSO involvement, to date, there is no clear mechanism at regional and national levels for the CC NGO EFA mechanism. In the future, we think the CC NGO EFA mechanism should find firmer root at the regional and national levels: institutionalizing CSO participation in the regional and national level spaces where the new education agenda will be concretized, contextualized, monitored and supported.
• It has been increasingly recognized that sustainable resourcing for the new education agenda will necessarily have to rely on several measures – and the lion share of which will have to be mobilized at the country level. In the last ESCAP Sustainable Development Financing Outreach Meeting in the Asia Pacific, civil society participants advanced a number of recommendations on financing for the new development agenda – with education as an intrinsic part of this. Echoing what we have also stated here yesterday, the new financing arrangement should be:

- rights-based and people-centered; aligned with the highest standards of human rights
- States who are the principal duty-bearers of human rights obligations, must remain the central actors in any new financing strategy;
- Financing decisions must be accountable, transparent, and inclusive of the participation and voice of civil society and the poor and marginalized peoples and groups. Democratic ownership as a core guiding principle must be upheld at all levels
- The critical role of ODA must be reaffirmed, based on principles of international solidarity and cooperation.
- Where the private sector is given a role, it must be done on the basis of additionally and a fair allocation of risks and benefits between the private and public sector. Private sector financing must be aligned to developing countries priorities and operate under clear guidelines for alignment, ownership, transparency, accountability, and regular reporting on results. Fiscal and public debt risks of Public-Private Partnerships must be properly accounted for through open and accountable processes; and that all these initiatives comply with binding human rights, social and environmental standards, including ILO standards.