Mr Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok  
Welcome Remarks

Distinguished guests, friends and colleagues,

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome you here today to this important regional high-level expert meeting. This high-level expert meeting is the third in the series and also a follow-up to the Asia-Pacific regional thematic consultation on education in the post-2015 development agenda held in March 2013. I am glad to see some familiar faces from the previous meetings and consultation with us here again today. For those who are new to this meeting, I am very delighted to have you involved in our regional discussions around developing a new vision for education, a very important part of our work at UNESCO Bangkok.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see from the backdrop, the theme of this meeting is “Beyond 2015: Transforming Teaching and Learning in the Asia-Pacific Region”. Why do we need to transform teaching and learning? One main reason is that we have been witnessing trends and challenges that have impacts on education in the region.

Over the past few decades, the Asia-Pacific region has undergone fast transformations. Many countries in the region have recorded remarkable economic progress over the years. Despite appreciable progress in reducing the absolute number of people living in extreme poverty over the past two decades, relative poverty has been on the rise and vast disparities between and within countries are prevalent.

Rapid industrialization and economic growth have given rise to increasing migration across and within countries. In the region, cross-border movements of labour have been growing two times faster on average than the growth of the labour force of the origin countries. Internal migration, mainly from rural to urban areas, has also accelerated in many countries in the region. Increasing human pressure on arable land, growing scarcity of natural resources per inhabitant, environmental degradation, and infrastructure bottlenecks are also challenges facing governments in the region.

In addition, the region is home to over four billion people, constituting 61 per cent of the world’s population. While the working-age population will continue to grow for some time in the region, this growth has started to slow down and will decrease sharply over the next two decades. These trends will create a polarized pattern of a very large youth population in South and West Asia and increasing share of older populations in East and Southeast Asia. More countries in the region are already increasingly concerned with ageing populations.

Apart from these, challenges in the region include climate change, youth and adult illiteracy, youth unemployment, persistence of child labour, marginalization and disadvantage based on gender, language, ethnicity, location and livelihoods, disability and HIV/AIDS. There are also intra- and inter-national conflicts
and social unrest, resulting in the increasing attention paid to how social, particularly educational, institutions can support peace and social cohesion in the region.

These changes that I have mentioned give us one clear message: challenges are no longer domestic but rather transnational. The region faces transnational challenges, which require transnational solutions. As countries become increasingly interconnected, the solutions must begin with providing good education through close collaboration across countries.

The relationship between learning and peace has long been considered important in Chinese philosophy. As one of the Four Books in Confucianism, the Great Learning (in Chinese Dà Xué) has been extremely influential in classical and modern Chinese thought. A famous quote of the Great Learning says:

*Extension of knowledge lay in the investigation of things. Things being investigated, knowledge became complete. Their knowledge being complete, their thoughts were sincere. Their thoughts being sincere, their hearts were then rectified. Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their States were rightly governed. Their States being rightly governed, the entire world was at peace.*

The quote concisely points out that individual action in the form of self-cultivation and learning is linked with goals such as ultimate world peace as well as linking together the spiritual and the material. I believe in the 21st century, when facing transnational challenges, the philosophy is still applicable and guides us how self-cultivation and learning can address these challenges and bring peace ultimately.

A new vision of education for the future has to go beyond academic achievements and cognitive skills which aim at producing a highly performing human capital for the labour market. There is increasing recognition of the role of education for the development of non-cognitive skills (or 21st century skills or transversal skills) to cope with multi-faceted transnational challenges. This more comprehensive conception of education acknowledges its centrality in promoting peace, responsible citizenship and sustainable development and responding to crucial transnational challenges.

With this background, UNESCO Bangkok has been undertaking collaborative research activities on transversal skills. The research includes examining the integration of learning to live together and peace education into curriculum, teacher training and assessment, the implications of integrating transversal skills in education policy and practice, including TVET teacher policies, and prevailing pedagogical approaches and innovative practices for the future.

In this meeting, researchers from 11 countries are going to present their findings on prevailing pedagogical approaches and innovative practices for the future in their respective countries or sub-regions. I believe their presentations and plenary discussions today and tomorrow will shed light on the many diverse understandings of learning. They will also contribute to the formulation of recommendations towards possible future orientations for pedagogical approaches in the region. These recommendations are particularly important to respond to the transnational challenges and changing learning requirements of the future.

In addition to collaborative research activities, UNESCO Bangkok has organized since last year a series of regional expert meetings and a regional consultation to discuss a new vision of education, and particularly relating to the development of a post-2015 agenda. In gist, the centrality of quality education and learning is
re-emphasized in the expert meeting discussions. The discussion outcomes of the regional consultation further contributed to the subsequent global thematic consultation on education, which proposed “equitable quality lifelong education and learning for all” as an overarching education goal to realize the world we want.

Building on these previous expert meetings and consultation on education beyond 2015, this three-day meeting will further discuss the question ‘What quality learning for the future?’, and address issues of teaching and learning towards policy reform in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, the meeting will also discuss a post-2015 framework (including possible indicators) for education focusing on quality education and learning, which is a most important and most timely discussion ultimately shaping the lives of so many, for so many years to come.

On this note, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Japan through the Japan Funds-in-Trust and the Korean National Commission for UNESCO for supporting this meeting. I believe the exchange of ideas among participants in this meeting would be able to contribute to further deliberations on a new vision of education in the global events on education, such as the World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development to be held in Nagoya, Japan in November 2014, and the global conference on education to be held in the Republic of Korea in May 2015.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very proud to be here with you today to exchange ideas on how education for the future should be shaped in order to promote peacekeeping, to improve the lives of poor people and to encourage respect for each other while striving for development and prosperity. I would like to take this valuable opportunity to thank you once again for your commitment to these discussions. I wish you an enjoyable three days here and may your deliberations over the coming days be most fruitful.

Thank you.