Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you at this high-level expert meeting.

No policy area has more impact across all the development goals than education. I am sure you will agree with me that education is the single most important factor in building stronger, healthier and more sustainable societies and economies. We have known for a long time, for instance, that children whose mothers are literate are more likely to live past infancy, attend school and put off marriage until adulthood.

It was with this in mind that the international community came together in 1990 to launch the Education for All, or “EFA”, movement, in Jomtien, Thailand. Ten years later, in Dakar, Senegal, representatives from 164 countries as well as civil society and multilateral partners came together at the World Education Forum to set six common goals for education: goals that range from increasing participation in early childhood care and education, through to universalizing primary education, achieving
gender equality, improving opportunities for young people and adults to engage in literacy and life skills training, and improving education quality. 2015 was identified as the target year for achieving these goals.

There is no denying that significant progress has been made since then. The number of out-of-school children of primary school age has decreased by 47 million, and young people are far more likely to be in post-primary education, with the number of secondary students having doubled in sub-Saharan Africa alone.

We can be proud of this progress, which is thanks to concerted efforts by governments, multilateral agencies and stakeholders worldwide to put education at the top of the policy agenda.

But we must not forget that we still have far to go to achieve our targets. Sixty-one million children of primary school age are still excluded from the classroom. More than seventy million adolescents have dropped out or were never able to enter the school system. Indeed, only half of young adolescents are enrolled in lower secondary education in low income countries, and this proportion has not improved in the last five years.

In addition, not all those who are lucky enough to be enrolled are learning as we would expect them to do. Many of those that do graduate from primary education emerge with very weak basic skills. The 2012 issue of UNESCO’s Education for All Global Monitoring Report, which tracks progress against the EFA goals, indicates that more than a third of children, whether they are in school or not, cannot read or count. In fact, a study in
one African country [Mali] showed that eight out of ten second grade students could not read a single word in a national language! Many more finish their schooling without having acquired the skills needed to find a decent job.

The challenges we face are multiple, and multi-dimensional. With only three years left until 2015, we need a last big drive to get as close as possible to the targets we set twelve years ago.

UNESCO and the United Nations community are taking this imperative very seriously. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, recently launched a Global Education Initiative, which is an additional push to reach the EFA goals and mobilize the whole world in favour of education. This initiative has three strong components: getting out-of-school children into education; improving quality of learning; and going back to the basic purpose of building a peaceful and sustainable society by promoting education for global citizenship. UNESCO is working hard with our sister agencies to make this initiative a success.

In order to do so, we need to redouble our efforts in key areas of education.

The Global Monitoring Report found that 16 billion US dollars are needed to fill the financing gap for achieving Education for All. But even if that money was found, it would not be possible to immediately put all 61 million out-of-school children into education. Schools need teachers – teachers that are well-qualified and motivated. This is why UNESCO is convinced that in
order to address the challenges, it will be critical to increase the number and improve the quality of teachers.

Indeed, teachers are the single biggest factor affecting the quality of education. To achieve universal primary education alone, the world’s countries will need to recruit an extra 5.4 million teachers by 2015. This figure covers both the 2 million new posts that need to be created, and those that will leave the profession between now and then. We also need to ensure that teachers have the right qualifications and work under motivating conditions, so that they can be effective.

We therefore need more action on teachers.

UNESCO also considers that it is important to go beyond a focus on basic education, by taking a holistic approach to education systems. Indeed, we do not believe that it is desirable, or even possible, to build a well-functioning primary school system without improving the other levels at the same time. Participation in early childhood care and education leads to better academic results in primary school. Good-quality secondary education not only creates cohorts of critical thinkers that can contribute to the development of their communities; its very existence also motivates students and their families to finish primary schooling.

And without higher education, it is not possible to train the teachers that our schools need, or to carry out the high-level research and innovation required in our quest for a sustainable future for all.
I know I am preaching to an audience of the converted when I say that investing in higher education is a smart move by any government. In the last half-century, the world has witnessed a ‘massification’ of higher education – with even more rapid acceleration in recent years in countries such as China and India. In South Korea, some 80 per cent of young people are now enrolled in higher education! However, many countries, particularly in Africa, are still far from responding to the strong demand for higher education, with only 5 in 100 young people enrolled at university.

Similarly, there is scope to significantly expand opportunities for skills development for the world of work. Too many graduates are unable to find decent work, with many employers bemoaning their lack of job-related skills. In fact, if we want to maintain the current employment rate over the next decade in the Arab States, South and West Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa, by 2020 we will need to create 57 million new jobs to absorb the new cohorts. Yet only 11 per cent of secondary school students are enrolled in technical and vocational education and training, and access to alternative programmes such as apprenticeships and work-study programmes is often restricted. Very few students are exposed to the principles and practice of entrepreneurship, or to the development of skills fostering creativity and innovation in the workplace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whether we are talking about early childhood care, about primary or secondary schooling, about literacy, technical and vocational training or higher education; and whether our geographical focus is on poor, low
income or wealthy countries one challenge remains central: the **quality and relevance** of education. This is a clear signal that I have received from the Ministers of Education of many countries that I have met in the past few years. The studies undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development within the framework of its Programme for International Student Assessment, or ‘PISA’, have shown that even in countries known for educational excellence, learning outcomes are unevenly distributed across socio-economic groups. This is particularly true where education systems are rife with inequalities – where the education a child receives, and his or her learning outcomes, depends largely on the economic, geographical or cultural status of the family.

Moreover, let us not forget that learning is not just about learning to read, write and count. Nor must our education systems aim merely to shuttle students from school into jobs. UNESCO’s vision is far more ambitious: we want to build a new generation that contributes to sustainable development through responsible practices based on human dignity and cultural diversity. We want to foster the development of ‘**global citizens**’ who want a better, more equal and more just world, and are prepared to put their full weight behind achieving it.

As we move towards 2015, we must take stock of this context and set a path for the way forward. Education for All is still an ‘unfinished agenda’. While we redouble our efforts to meet the goals set in 2000, we must also reflect on the vision of education and learning that we wish to promote beyond 2015.
UNESCO is at the centre of this process. In 2015, we will hold a major international conference in the Republic of Korea to adopt a new set of goals for education. As world-class policy-makers and scholars, we need your input on what these goals may look like.

Among the questions that we must ask are: should we identify a common set of goals for all countries, or should these vary according to the educational context of each nation or region? Should they maintain a focus on the ‘unfinished agenda’ of basic education defined in the Dakar goals, or should they go beyond these to include upper secondary and higher education, as well as skills development? Keeping in mind the need to develop measurable benchmarks for each goal, how should we reflect competencies linked to global citizenship and sustainable development?

UNESCO has developed a set of principles that outline our vision of what the future education and development agenda should be based on. We firmly believe that future goals should place equity as well as effective and relevant learning at their core. In particular, they could incorporate the need to recognize and validate the acquisition of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills in formal, non-formal and informal settings, within a lifelong learning perspective. Furthermore, the goals should be relevant to all countries, perhaps with country-determined targets. They should also recognize the many changes to the learning environment that we have witnessed since 2000 – such as the development of new information technologies and the creation of new learning spaces.
In the coming years, UNESCO will work closely with the international community, including academics, to reach a consensus on a new set of education goals. We will work hard to promote our vision that effective and relevant lifelong learning is the key to creating a peaceful, sustainable world.

The debate is open.

Thank you.