Good morning and welcome honoured guests and participants to this special occasion.

We are delighted to have many eminent participants among us, particularly the Honourable Minister of Education from Sri Lanka, Mr. Susil Premajayantha, who will be giving one of the keynote speeches. We also wish to welcome Mr. Abdul Rahman Abu Haniffa, the Director of Government Policy Programs for Malaysia and ASEAN, of Intel, who will be delivering the second keynote speech.

As the theme of the event clearly indicated, we are here to celebrate. I think we all need a boost every now and then, especially after witnessing several major disasters in the region in recent months. Our thoughts and hearts go out to the victims of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and of the earthquake and floods in China. Even now, the people in the affected areas are still living under hardship conditions. Elsewhere, people are tightening their belts and cutting back wherever they can to cope with the rising costs of food prices and fuel. But even as we continue to help mitigate the plights of the poor and suffering, we should remember and give praise to the good and positive efforts we see around us. And this is good reason for celebration.

UNESCO has a key interest in increasing access to education and in improving the quality of education. Thus, our ICT in Education programmes seek to identify and promote ways for ICT to enhance the reach and quality of education. We try to empower teachers, educators, principals, administrators and policy makers to make informed and judicious choices regarding the use of ICT in education. We also wish to facilitate the access to, and use of, ICT tools by educators and learners.
With the support of the Japanese Funds-in-Trust and in line with UNESCO’s efforts to achieve the Education for All and lifelong learning goals, UNESCO implemented a project on Innovative Practices in ICT in Education. The project aims to identify, document, share and multiply ICT in education innovations. As part of the project, the UNESCO ICT in Education Innovation Awards was launched in 2007 to recognize outstanding work by (i) teacher and teacher educators, (ii) educational planners and administrators, and (iii) non-formal educators.

We received about 150 responses to our call for submissions. The four judges – Professor Fumihiko Shinohara from Tokyo Gakugei University Dr. Paulina Pannen, the former Director of SEAMOLEC, Professor Hyeonjin Kim from the Korea National University of Education and Dr. Miao Feng-chun from UNESCO Bangkok – had a hard time selecting the winners. And we are here today to congratulate these innovators and recognize their dedication and commitment to education.

On this happy note, we must thank Intel for their generosity in sponsoring three laptops as prizes for the three top winners. We hope that the recipients will use their prizes to continue their good work in teaching their students.

Many organizations, foundations and corporations have, in their own unique ways, contributed to the technological advances that have had major impact on the way we think, socialize and communicate. They have provided visionary educators the means to develop and implement innovative approaches in delivering educational outcomes. Among us on this occasion are many such innovators and their achievements should also be recognized and celebrated. You will have the opportunity to find more about their programmes during the Market Place and Exhibition event later today.

The Innovative Practices project has included a training component to enhance the capacities of our target groups in optimizing the use of ICT in education. On the 2nd and 3rd day of this event, you will be able to participate in the training workshops featuring two innovative approaches that have been successful in increasing the performances of students.
While most of you will be learning with your heads, hearts and hands in the training workshop, an equally important Key Players’ Meeting will be taking place on the second day. Indeed, it is difficult to bring key players together given their busy schedules, so this occasion is a great opportunity for invited participants to share information on their programmes and activities, and explore potential collaboration.

Finally, as the lead agency for Education for Sustainable Development in the Asia and Pacific region, UNESCO is conscious of the impact of meetings such as this one on the environment. We recognize the need to reduce our ecological footprint by using ICT to conduct virtual meetings and conferences. Yes, we have increased the number of conference calls. Yes, we will try to communicate virtually as much as possible. But there is no denying the importance of face-to-face meetings and the value of personal and tangible interactions and networking.

I hope you have noticed our efforts in cutting down costs and reducing our carbon footprint by providing a 4-in-1 event – an Award Ceremony, Exhibition, Training Workshops and Key Players’ Meeting. I hope that we will all give our best to make this occasion a really special one and be thankful that we have this opportunity to meet, interact and exchange knowledge.

Once again, I welcome you to Bangkok and let us celebrate the spirit of innovation collectively and productively.