Policy Forum for Asia and The pacific: Policy and Practices in Open Educational Resources
Bangkok, 23-24 April 2012

Opening remarks by Etienne Clement, Deputy Director, UNESCO Bangkok

Ms. Churairat Sangboonnum,
Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education,
And Secretary-General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO,

Sir John Daniel,
President and CEO,
Commonwealth of Learning (COL),

Dr. Montree Yamkasikorn,
Project Director, the Thai Teachers TV Project

Mr. Ishan Sudeera Abeywardena,
Senior Lecturer at the School of Science and Technology,
Wawasan Open University,

Distinguished Speakers and Participants,

I am very pleased to welcome you all at this Forum covering an issue which has attracted increased interest from governments and other policy makers in Asia and the Pacific over the last decade: the so-called “Open Educational Resources”.

I am far from being an expert on this matter so I am definitely looking forward to what the distinguished speakers will report to us on this matter. But let me recall that we call “OER” the teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use or re-purposing by others. Practically OERs cover curriculum, maps, course materials, textbooks, videos, multimedia applications, podcasts, and any other materials that have been designed for use in teaching and learning and that are openly available for use by educators and students, without an accompanying need to pay royalties or license fees.
Organized jointly by UNESCO Asia and the Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok, the Commonwealth of Learning and Thai Teachers TV, this forum has for objective to hear the voice of the “practitioners” of OER in Asia and The Pacific. Its purpose is to bring the issue of OERs beyond the so-called OER Community of Practitioners in order to increase the level of understanding of OERs by educational decision makers and quality assurance experts as well as to promote their wider use.

It is indeed expected that participants in this forum will agree on several key recommendations to be addressed to Governments on the development of policies aiming at promoting and facilitating the use of OERs. Such policies can cover intellectual property rights and copyright, human resource, access to and use of appropriate software, hardware or the Internet, to give just a few examples.

But this process of establishing recommendation on policies on OER is not limited to Asia and the Pacific. It is part of a global initiative and process launched in 2010, through collaboration and a joint Work Plan Agreement between UNESCO and the COL. The initiative focuses in the first instance on higher education institutions located in Africa where the access to supporting technology cannot be taken for granted. But the need to recommend policies is also felt by practitioners in a number of countries in Asia and the Pacific, thus the organization of this Forum for our region.

The recommendations that are going to be presented during the Forum will be reported as Asia Pacific contribution for the preparation of a World OER Conference to be held at UNESCO in Paris on 20-22 June 2012.

At that Conference in Paris, governments will be invited to adopt a statement (referred to as the ‘Paris statement’) on OERs that will include a clear definition of open licenses and encourage governments to support the principle that the products of publicly funded work should carry such licenses.

But this is leading me to anticipate too early on tomorrow’s work where participants will be invited to reflect their discussions into recommendations for the Paris statement. Before that, today, we will hear the voice of the practitioners. Let me, on that occasion, thank all the speakers, and first of all Sir John Daniel, President and CEO of the Commonwealth of education, who
has inspired a generation of UNESCO colleagues in the field of education and will lead our work during this forum.

My warmest thanks are also addressed to Ms. Churairat Sangboonnum, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, and Secretary-General of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO, co-organizer of this event and long term partner of UNESCO Bangkok, to Dr. Montree Yamkasikorn, Project Director, the Thai Teachers TV Project, to Mr. Ishan Sudeera Abeywardena, Senior Lecturer at the School of Science and Technology, Wawasan Open University as well as to the more than twenty eminent speakers who will make presentations all over these two days of exchange and work.

On behalf of UNESCO, I wish all of them, all of you, a fruitful dialogue and successful outcomes of our deliberations.