Mr. Etienne Clement, Deputy Director UNESCO Bangkok,
Distinguished Resource Persons and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning at the opening of the **Policy Forum for Asia and the Pacific on Policy and Practices in Open Educational Resources**. On behalf of the Thai National Commission for UNESCO, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to you all, especially those who have traveled long distances to Bangkok to join this important regional forum.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all know that the explosion and rapid advancement of information and communication technology or ICT has changed many aspects of our lives today and totally transformed the landscape of knowledge. It has opened up tremendous opportunities with regard to educational delivery mechanisms, created new teaching-learning paradigms and broken down many of the long standing barriers to learning to benefit people of all ages and backgrounds. Accompanying these changes is the development of Open Educational Resources or OER, which refers to web-based materials that are offered freely and openly for re-use in teaching, learning and research.
In the decade since the term was first introduced, governments, organizations, and institutions have begun to explore the potentials of OER under memoranda of understanding and frameworks of agreement on educational cooperation. In some cases this has lead to the establishment of virtual universities and to the sharing of software programmes, courseware, lectures and library materials. At the tertiary level, it has facilitated the conduct of joint research and dissemination of research outcomes. It has also opened up possibilities for teachers and students to participate in national, regional and global online, project-based learning on global issues that are a shared concern. However, the identification and exploration of such possibilities has also highlighted certain obstacles.

At the top of this list is overcoming the digital divide. If OER is to truly expand access to quality learning for everyone, including the disadvantaged or disabled, efficiently and throughout life, then wide disparities in terms of ICT infrastructure and levels of ICT literacy both within and between countries must be addressed. In Thailand, establishing a nationwide, hi-speed communications network that is broad based, reliable and reasonably priced and providing free access to internet in public areas are urgent priorities of the current government. The Ministry of Education is also about to distribute the first of the tablet under the One Tablet Per Child policy which will ensure teachers and children in urban, rural and remote areas have equal access to information and resources. In the near future, therefore, we should have the necessary platform from which to promote the development and use of OERs.
Thailand is pleased to participate in this regional policy forum as a means to build our knowledge and understanding of OER and their potential together with representatives from other countries in the region. We look forward to the showcasing of innovative OER policy and practices and welcome this opportunity to explore related issues. This intensification of dialogue is greatly appreciated in the lead up to the 2012 World Congress on Open Educational Resources from 20-22 June in Paris.

In closing, I would like to thank all those at UNESCO Paris, UNESCO Bangkok, and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) who have contributed to the organization of this very timely event and wish you all a very productive and enjoyable meeting.

Now I wish to declare the Meeting open.

Thank you.