FRIDAY, 20 April 2007

**Director, UNESCO Bangkok, Proposed Closing Remarks:**

Good afternoon everyone! I hope you had a productive three-day training workshop discussing issues related to education and developing story ideas.

I wish I could have joined you in Hanoi but I had to attend to other pressing matters in China. Nevertheless, I hope you come out of this workshop more aware of the importance of education in all our lives and the wide-range of stories you can write about it.

Education for All is not just about early childhood care and primary education, but about continuing, lifelong education that covers both the formal and non-formal sectors. Education for All, as the title implies, is about ensuring that every child, youth and adult has access to good quality education.

Education was considered so important that it was recognized as a basic human right in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Upon the millennium, in the year 2000, your governments with strong global support agreed on the provision of free and universal education. Still today, seven years on, the commitment has gone unanswered.

- 77 million children globally are out of primary school, and over 9 million of these children live in East Asia.
- To add to this, the EFA target of getting the same number of girls and boys in primary education by 2005 has been missed by most countries in the region.

In this region, children are left out of school due to poverty or disability, or because they live in remote areas or speak a language different from that used in school, or simply because they are girls. Globally, the number of children out of school in the poorest 20% of households is more than triple that in the richest households.

It is critical for governments to do all they can to address poverty and the marginalization of some sectors by:

- Abolishing school fees to make primary education truly free;
- Providing grants and scholarships for marginalized groups;
- Creating better opportunities for the disabled;
- Offering incentives and community-based efforts to get children out of child labour;
- Expanding and developing early childhood programmes; and
- Implementing mother tongue education for initial literacy and for greater mastery of the national language

Policies to overcome barriers to education are in place in many of your countries, but they must be further refined, targeted and expanded.

However, the denial of this fundamental human right is not only limited to children. Young people and adults have the right to education too. Yet:

- One in five adults – 781 million globally – lack basic literacy skills. East Asia alone has 124 million people aged 15 and above who lack basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.

The bad news is that these are the conservative estimates. In fact, these figures are most likely much higher.
We know from research that the child of parents with little or no education, tend to be out-of-school more than those with education; and therefore, the cycle of the uneducated will tend to continue.

If the school system fails the first time, second chances should be made available through:

- Bridging programmes for youth and adults lacking formal schooling;
- Youth and adult literacy programmes; and
- Programmes in post-conflict situations

The consequences of another generation of un-educated children will be devastating.

Education plays a critical role in the civic, social and the economic well-being and overall development of a country. At a time of great growth and positive development in the region, we cannot afford to neglect our futures for the immediate, but short-lived benefits of the day.

UNESCO urges and supports countries in this region to:

1. Emphasize equity and inclusion – ensuring that all children and learners, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, language, income or social status, have opportunity to learn
2. Increase public spending on education and focus it better on issues of equity and quality
3. Increase aid to basic education and allocate it where most needed

In a first step to address many of these actions, your countries are currently undertaking a review of the implementation of national EFA programmes.

The review, called the EFA Mid-Decade Assessment, intends to:

- Assess the progress and gaps in the achievement of the national and global targets and goals of Education for All; and
- Identify and locate the remaining gaps in terms of quality and equity within the country

The results of this assessment will be used to better formulate policies within the Ministry of Education and beyond, in order to come closer to attaining the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs by 2015.

Upon your return home, I encourage you to follow up on this assessment with your respective Ministries of Education and strengthen public awareness of on-going activities toward the betterment of education in your country.

As media practitioners, you, too, are responsible for upholding the right to education by maintaining and strengthening public awareness for monitoring and reporting on issues related to education, and for providing an objective perspective on the realities in the education sector in your country.

Next week, the world will also mark EFA Global Action Week to campaign for the right to education and the realization of Education for All. I hope you can put to practice the things you have learned during this workshop when you cover activities for the Global Action Week in your countries. Many activities have been lined up not only for the week of 23-29 April but throughout the year to raise awareness and drum up support on the theme of education as a human right.

Time is running out. The 2015 target for the EFA goals and the MDGs is getting close. All of us must work together with a sense of urgency to ensure that all children, youth and adults have access to good quality education.

The media plays a key role in influencing government policies and shaping public opinion. As you go back to your countries, I hope you will be able to put the things you learned here to use. Your work can provide a catalyst for enlightened debate on key issues and challenges in education that would hopefully pave the way for reforms towards the realization of Education for All.

I look forward to working with you all in the future in the campaign towards quality Education for All!

At this point, I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Followed by short Q & A session

For a profile of the Director, please visit: http://www.unescobkk.org/index.php?id=10