UNESCO co-organizes 2nd Thailand Education Congress on the Occasion of World Teachers’ Day, 5-7 October 2006

BANGKOK, October 2006- UNESCO Bangkok has called on Thailand to continue working for the improvement in the quality of its teachers, the conditions they work in, and the equitable distribution of teachers particularly between rural and urban areas.

“What is critical in Thailand is the distribution of teachers. In large urban schools, there tend to be a surplus of teachers and those teachers tend to more often meet national quality standards. In smaller schools in rural areas, there is not enough, and those present are often under-qualified,” Sheldon Shaeffer, Director of the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education said during a presentation at the Thailand Second Education Congress on the Occasion of World Teachers’ Day 2006, which is celebrated today (5 October).

He lauded Thailand’s efforts in staffing schools with more qualified teachers. According to the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment or ONESQA, the majority of Thai teachers meet national standards on teacher qualifications. However, teachers in the South, the Northeast and Central Thailand lag behind their counterparts in terms of qualifications. Schools in West and East Thailand have the highest percentages of qualified teaching staff. Moreover, teachers’ capacity in delivering effective teaching and learning with appropriate emphasis on student-centered learning remains weak, a crucial factor to ensure that children actually learn in school.

Providing teachers with the appropriate pre- and in-service training is crucial and so is extending to them the appropriate salary and incentives. The World Bank suggests that the average teacher’s salary should aim at 3.5% of GDP per capita.

Ensuring the safety and security of teachers, particularly in the three southernmost provinces plagued by insurgency is also vital. Providing them with the proper resources, maintaining ideal pupil-teacher ratio and class size are also important considerations.

“Teachers are the heart of the education system. There can be no viable long-term investment solution to our education challenges and teacher shortages without investment in training and measures to promote respect for the teaching profession. It is essential to support teachers professionally, boosting their determination and motivation through decent employment and working conditions and adequate remuneration. We also need to promote social dialogue to ensure that teachers’ voices are integrated into basic education reform decisions,” Shaeffer said quoting the joint UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and ILO statement to mark World Teachers’ Day.

Having qualified and motivated teachers is crucial for countries to attain universal primary education by 2015, a goal Thailand is committed to under the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) initiatives.

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