

as of 17 March 2011

**Welcome Address by
H.E Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
at the 10th Meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All (EFA)
Royal Cliff Beach Resort Hotel,
Jomtien-Pattaya, Chonburi, Thailand
Tuesday 22 March 2011, 16.30 hrs.**

May it Please Your Royal Highness,

1. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and the people of Thailand, I would like to begin by extending a very warm welcome to delegates to the 10th Meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All. Once again, what brings us together here is our shared belief in education and training as the key to alleviating poverty, enhancing human security and building longer-term resilience in the face of global change. This belief also drives our commitment to achieving the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015.
2. In 1990 at Jomtien Beach in Pattaya, Thailand hosted the widely acknowledged World Conference on Education for All. This culminated in a global commitment by 155 countries to providing quality education to all children, youth and adults. A decade later in 2000, to heighten that resolve, clear objectives were identified and articulated in six EFA goals. A total of 164 countries attending the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal in 2000, pledged to work towards the achievement of those goals. In doing this, we have focused on early childhood care and education, universal primary education, adult learning and life skills, literacy, gender equality, and quality education for national and global development.
3. The High Level Group on Education for All was set up to serve as a mechanism for coordination. It meets annually to ensure that political support, as well as financial and technical resources, remains focused on achievement of the goals. This year, it is our privilege and pleasure to co-host this 10th Meeting together with UNESCO. It is the first time that the High Level Group has met in one of the South East Asian cluster countries. Indeed, it is fitting that we are returning to Jomtien-Pattaya, twenty years after the EFA agenda was launched here.
4. On this auspicious occasion, I wish to welcome to Thailand all distinguished ministers, vice ministers and high officials for education, representatives from international, regional and national development agencies, UN agencies, as well as EFA partners from the private sector and civil society. Together, we will identify strategic and operational initiatives to address remaining challenges to tackle key education issues between now and 2015. We have come a long way, but of course, we will think for the future, beyond 2015.

5. Country and regional reports indicate that increasing access to basic educational services in many cases has taken precedence over quality improvements. Quality must not be dependent upon the country where a person is born. Moreover, there should neither be discrepancy between urban and rural areas nor discrimination as a result of family background, physical or mental capacity, religion or ethnicity. It is the right of each and every individual to receive quality education and to become productive members of society. What we must ask ourselves is how far we are from making this a reality.

6. As part of the second decade of education reform in Thailand, the Thai Government is investing in education and focusing on the quality of teachers, as a factor determining the desired morality-led and knowledge-based economy and society. Launched in 2009, the 15-year free quality education project has been an important strategy for maintaining educational access and participation of all students, especially those most at risk as a result of the economic downturn. This applies equally to non-Thai citizens, especially the most vulnerable in society. Integration in the school curriculum helps educate young people to be mindful of the impact their actions have on the lives and livelihoods of future generations. It also instills in them a sense of social responsibility and leadership.

7. This, we believe, is the key to sustainable development. This also improves the overall quality of life of the Thai people, under the guidance of His Majesty the King's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for many decades. The philosophy's central principles include moderation, responsible consumption, and proper risk management, and for the Thai people this is applied in real life.

8. As we move closer towards realising the ASEAN Community in 2015, member states are taking steps to ensure that the peoples benefit from regional integration. In Thailand, we aim to shift the vocational-basic education student ratio to 60:40, and we have established a Professional Qualifications Institute to facilitate the development of manpower and match its supply with the needs of the market. We are also upgrading the skills of the existing work force.

9. This meeting will allow us to determine what form of contributions UNESCO and other EFA partners can provide, how existing projects and initiatives can be adjusted and improved, and what new avenues there are to explore. It also enables us to review progress, share our experiences and support each other's efforts to move forward. It will encourage national, regional and global collaboration across all sectors. In this regard, Thailand reaffirms its support to UNESCO and its commitment to the achievement of the EFA goals.

10. May I express my gratitude to Your Royal Highness for graciously presiding over the Opening Ceremony of the 10th Meeting of the High Level Group on Education for All.