

Daniel Toole

**UNICEF Regional Director's Speech at the Opening Ceremony to the Asia-Pacific
Meeting on Education 2030, 25-27 November 2015**

Excellencies,

Honourable Ministers, Permanent Secretary Ministry of Education,
government representatives

Gwang-Jo Kim, Director UNESCO Bangkok, Development Partners

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen. Friends and key supporters of Education

Sawasdee krup.

It's a real pleasure and honour to be with you today and to have this
opportunity to make a brief speech on behalf of the three UNICEF
Regional Offices that cover huge Asia-Pacific region. Welcome to
Bangkok.

First of all, let me express my sincere thanks to the Royal Thai
Government for hosting this landmark meeting and for their
continuing commitment to ensuring equity and quality in the
education system. And thanks to all of you for continuing to come to

these meetings, which help to confirm the policy frameworks for education in the region. I understand that this is the first region to meet to discuss plans for education post 2030 after the World Education Forum in Incheon. We were also the first region to develop regional priorities going into the process that led to World Education Forum. So congratulations to you all, and particularly to our partner UNESCO for this leadership that influences both what happens in our region, and also on the global agenda.

This region has been very strong in sustaining co-ordination around the former MDG goals. I understand the EFA Technical Working Group which organises these regional fora has now met 40 times. No other region has experienced such continuity and cohesion. Yet we also understand the need to enhance this and other co-ordination mechanisms going into the future and to strengthen connections with other sectoral mechanisms. UNICEF will strive to ensure these cross-sectoral connections in areas such as early childhood development within the holistic framework of the SDGs. We also recognize that coordination mechanisms also need to be enhanced at country level.

Investment in education is vital to ensure that all children achieve their rights to education. It is also foundational to human and social development as a whole and to peaceful co-existence in an increasingly turbulent world. UNICEF has been working closely with your governments in our common pursuit of the MDGs and EFA goals since the Jomtien Declaration here in Thailand in 1990! We have seen tremendous progress across the Asia Pacific region, but the job remains unfinished.

In many countries, children still lack access to school and many fail to complete education. Education is the right of all children, everywhere. Hence our continued support for the Out of School Children's Initiative. Together, we must continue to identify the barriers and bottlenecks that exclude some children and youth from education. These bottlenecks include poverty, remoteness, disabilities, gender, ethnicity and minority status as well as conflict, disasters and under-investment.

UNICEF is committed to helping governments address all forms of inequality. For example, we must not be content with achieving

gender parity in primary education when inequalities exist at higher levels or when gender-based violence remains a critical issue in many countries. We must also address barriers affecting boys' education in many countries of the region.

The new SDG goal for Education demonstrates a clear shift in thinking for 2030: "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning".

With this goal as a backdrop, I wish to highlight three key priorities:

First, the SDG goal shifts our focus to an equity focus (for all) and to learning outcomes. All children have the right to quality education, not just to go to school. This means continuing focus on access for all and an enhanced focus on assessment, curriculum and teachers, and all the other factors that constitute quality education linked to lifelong learning.

Secondly there is clear consensus globally about the need to invest in early childhood development, a clear SDG target. Neurological research has established beyond any doubt that interventions to support a child's development must be in place even before birth and

this support must be cross sectoral, including health, nutrition and sanitation as well as early stimulation and learning. Effective and lifelong learning require strong foundations. Hence the growing global commitment early childhood development, including early childhood education to ensure that foundational skills and competencies are in place to achieve quality educational outcomes.

Thirdly we must ensure that education responds to our rapidly changing world. Education must help build the foundations of a more peaceful society, enhance gender equality and promote sustainable development. Education programmes will need to help develop creativity and resilience to address such challenges. This includes a number of competences such as empathy, social and emotional intelligence, and communication skills, etc., which are often clustered under ‘global citizenship’. This is why our flagship initiative with SEAMEO – the South East Asia Primary Learning Metrics - includes the domain of global citizenship. We are delighted that several countries have committed to this initiative in ASEAN and are committed to supporting similar regional assessments in the regions with our partners.

As we plan our collective commitments for the next 15 years, you can be assured of UNICEF's continued support to the education agenda in Asia and the Pacific. Together we can ensure that the right of all children to education everywhere is guaranteed and that it leads to lifelong learning and productive creative citizenship.

I wish you well in your deliberations and look forward to the outcomes of this key meeting.