

**Opening Remarks of the ESWG Chair
Education Congress, 19 March 2014**

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Your Excellency Academician Dr. SOK An, Honorable Deputy Prime Minister
Your Excellency Dr. Hang Choun Naron, Minister of Education, Youth and Sport
Excellencies Secretaries of State, Lok Chumteav, Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,
ESWG Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be here today at the opening of the 2014 Annual Education Congress on behalf of the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) and share some reflections to further strengthening our efforts to improve education, teaching and learning for all learners in Cambodia.

The ESWG would like to congratulate you Excellency Minister, the Senior Leadership of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Education Congress Secretariat in preparing and organizing this Congress. We also acknowledge the active engagement of all the technical departments of MoEYS, and all the Provincial Offices of Education for conducting the Provincial Education Congresses in preparing for this national congress.

Every year, the Congress brings together all the key actors of the Education and Training sector to take stock of the past year, celebrate the successes, and identify strategies and actions for the year ahead to further improve delivery of educational opportunities for the Cambodian learners. This year's Congress begins the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018, step towards realizing the Royal Government's development aspiration of becoming an upper-middle income country by 2030.

Your Excellency, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all are aware of the importance of education. Let me share few examples from the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report 2013/14 which was launched in Cambodia (please get a copy of the summary in Khmer) on 6th March by his Excellency Minister. In Viet Nam, children whose mothers have reached lower secondary education are 67% less likely to be stunted than those whose mothers have no education. In rural Indonesia, an additional year of schooling reduced the chances of falling back into poverty by 25%.

As Cambodia moves towards its goal of attaining the middle-income-country status in the years ahead, there is a need to consider its human capital development strategy very carefully. The middle-income Cambodia we envision in 2030 today will require an educated, trained and skilled human capital. We should bear in mind that the generation of 20-year old in 2030 are aged 4 years now about to start their education life cycle. Hence, we need to start now with adequate investments in education to ensure a strong foundation through early childhood care and education, good quality learning and training opportunities, equipping all the Cambodian children - including children with disabilities and from ethnic minorities with technical, personal and social skills to work and live together in an inter-connected and inter-dependent global society.

The Education Sector Working Group is pleased to acknowledge the reform efforts and the open-dialogue, particularly during the recent months, on opportunities and challenges in the education and training in Cambodia. ESWG is pleased to note that the Royal Government has taken steps to reverse the declining trends in budget allocation to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Another positive and encouraging development have been to ensure that the Teachers are paid their salaries on time and through the banking system. Though too early to judge, this is indeed going to have a positive impact on the Teachers morale and professionalism.

Excellency, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to share with you, highlights of some of the dialogues we have had, significant progress made so far and challenges we need to address:

- First and foremost is the finalization of the Education Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018 under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with a focus on “quality with equity”. As a result Cambodia successfully applied and received US\$38.5 million from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and implementation by the Ministry will start this month. Further, this ESP also enables the development partners and ESWG members to align their continued support to Cambodia.
- Second, we have successfully concluded the joint retreat in late January. The retreat while reviewing the progress, identified measures to be considered for the implementation of the ESP, namely, structures for implementation, monitoring, and management of the ESP, the ongoing Public Financial Management (PFM) reform in the education sector, Curriculum Reform, Higher Education, Teacher Development, and the scholarships, particularly targeting secondary education students. Implementation of these measures will no doubt have a lasting impact on the “quality with equity” – particularly to address persisting challenges of repetition and drop-out at both primary and secondary school level. To ensure an effective monitoring of these measures, further efforts will have to be made in improving the quality of data and strengthening of the Education Management Information Systems.

- Third, within the framework of the Joint-Technical Working Group, we have agreed to focus on increasing Basic Education Completion as an outcome for the next 5 year period, with increased student enrolment and reduced drop-out in lower secondary. As Cambodia joins the ASEAN economic community in less than a year, basic and technical and vocational training will have to become priority of the priorities for Cambodia and the Royal Government. This means ensuring that those who enrol do not drop-out, and they complete. And those who could not, have a second chance education opportunities through non-formal and skills development programmes with clear equivalency mechanisms. In this regard, application of the recently approved Cambodian Qualifications Framework is of critical importance.
- Fourth, need for monitoring of the learning achievement to ensure that the learning is indeed taking place. The 2013/14 UNESCO EFA Monitoring Report reveals that one in four students in poorer countries despite spending 4 years in school are not able read a single sentence. This is creating a learning crisis which is costing governments \$129 billion a year, about ten per cent of spending on primary education being lost. We are pleased that monitoring of learning assessment in grades 3, 6 and 8 is part of the Core Breakthrough Indicators under the ESP and we look forward to working with the Ministry and partners in establishing and implementing clear evidence of learning in the class-rooms and reporting mechanisms for the outcomes, such as the Education Congress.
- Focus on learning brings to my fifth point. This Learning requires qualified, trained, motivated and professionally supported teachers. We are pleased acknowledge the Royal Government's decision to ensure that teachers will be paid in time, through banking system. As we speak, there are serious challenges in recruitments, upgrading the qualifications of a large number of teachers, teacher allocation and deployment, retention as well as in attracting good candidates to the teacher profession. The OECD and UNESCO Global Monitoring Reports establish that if qualified and motivated people are to be attracted to and retained in teaching, then the teacher salaries and incentives will have to be enough to keep his/her family above the poverty line (*Example, if a teacher has four family members to support, then s/he needs to earn at least US\$10 per day to keep the family above the poverty line of US\$2 per day per person*).
- Sixth, learning also requires adequate provision of textbooks and learning materials. ESWG is pleased to see that significant increase in budget for the textbooks. It is also one of the Joint-Monitoring indicators and look forward to work together with the Ministry in monitoring the distribution to ensure that all learners have received the textbooks as defined. Also we hope that the provision of school improvement grants will enable the schools to acquire additional learning materials as per their needs.
- Seventh, we would like to congratulate the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for finalizing and approving the Country Literacy Action Plan, which will enable scaling-up of literacy interventions to ensure that the estimated two million

illiterate people in the country are able to exercise their right to literacy and learning opportunities. Effective implementation will also be necessary to ensure that Cambodia will not miss the EFA Literacy goal.

- Eighth, the ESWG is pleased to note the draft policy brief on higher education and welcomes the proposed reform initiatives to improve the governance and management of the higher-education sub-sector. As per the global and regional experiences and good practices, an autonomous institution mandated to ensure quality assurance and accreditation with qualified and trained specialist will be necessary to realize the desired results from the reforms.
- Ninth, Youth employment, mismatch between the expectations and aspirations of the young people and the labor market remains a concern. The ESWG is encouraged by an increasing collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training within the framework of the Cambodian Qualifications Framework (CQF) in the recent months. We look forward to increased partnership with governmental as well as non-governmental and the private sector in effective implementation of the CQF, together with mechanisms to attract young students who had to drop-out of formal education system to technical and vocational education and training.
- Tenth, the ESWG congratulates the Royal Government in increasing Ministry of education's budget in 2014 and plan to further increase from 2015 onward, especially implementation of 100% program based budgeting in 2015. The ESWG encourages the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to carefully plan its investment programs in order to meet the ESP 2014-2018 policy objectives, enabling clear linkages between budget and policies. To improve budget execution, ESWG would like to encourage additional effort on three key tasks: 1) Improving financial management rules and procedures in close consultation with the Ministry of Economy and Finance to provide flexibility and autonomy to schools to effectively use the school operational budget; 2) Increase efficiency in budget execution by improving internal audit and procurement processes; and 3) conduct quarterly budget monitoring for timely identification and addressing of issues which would otherwise obstruct 100% spending of the budget.
- Eleventh, the ESWG welcomes the extensive work already in place on decentralization and de-concentration reforms by the Ministry. With functional mapping and near completion of the functional review, transfers of functions to sub-national level to improve effectiveness, efficiency and quality of educational services for all learners. The experiences from the ongoing implementation of Community Pre-Schools managed by Commune Councils will provide valuable lessons in planning and implementing further functional transfers.
- Last but not the least; the ESWG recognizes the need for further strengthening of capacities to effectively implement the envisaged reforms together with the sub-sectoral plans under the Education Strategic Plan. We are certain that with technical support of from the ESWG members together with the Capacity

Development Partnership Fund, Ministry will be able to acquire the necessary institutional and technical capacities to implement these reforms and monitor them effectively and efficiently.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are confident that the presentations, discussion and dialogue over the next three days will produce concrete recommendations for the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan 2014 – 2018. Together with the ESWG colleagues, I am looking forward to an active participation by all in the group discussions in order to provide meaningful inputs for the year ahead and the next ESP that is being drafted. We look forward that group discussions will go beyond generic conclusions, but concrete solutions for the challenges already identified.

On behalf of ESWG I would like to once again express our sincere appreciation and thanks to you, Your Excellency Deputy Prime Minister for advocating human capital development for the inclusive and sustainable development of Cambodia. We thank the Excellency Minister and his Senior Leadership Team of the Ministry, Technical Departments and Institutions and the Provincial Offices of Education for the partnership and dialogue. I would like to reiterate ESWG's continued support to the Royal Government of Cambodia and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the reforms and in improving all aspects of education towards the vision, goals and objectives of the Ministry under the committed leadership of His Excellency Minister Dr. Hang Chuon Naron.

My best wishes for a very engaging discussions and successful congress.

Thank You.