

Statement
by H.E. Mr. Abulkalam Abdul Momen, Vice-President of ECOSOC
Regional Meeting for Asia and the Pacific
For the 2011 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review
Jomtien, Thailand, 24 March 2011

Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I commend the Government of Thailand for hosting this Regional Meeting in advance of the Economic and Social Council's Annual Ministerial Review. It is a privilege for me to represent the President and the Bureau of ECOSOC in this meeting. I sincerely thank the Government and people of Thailand for their warm reception and generous hospitality.

As you know, the Council's Annual Ministerial Review was established to track progress and scale-up efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The review is complemented by a discussion of current global trends, allowing ECOSOC to focus on obstacles impeding the globally agreed development agenda — and more importantly, ways to overcome them.

This process has a special advantage. It brings a wide range of stakeholders to the table to discuss a specific theme — in this year's theme is education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Owing to technology, faster and cheaper communication, inquisitive media, Internet, YouTube and the like the world is becoming smaller and smaller while the challenges (like imparting education, climate change, food insecurity, better standard of living) and people's expectations are becoming higher and stronger. But unfortunately, resource constraints, infrastructural bottlenecks, both tangible and intangible, and global financial architecture are becoming an impediment to achieve internationally agreed goals for developing countries, the LDCs and SIDS being the worst affected. For example, in 2000 the global leadership agreed to achieve MDG goals by 2015 but sadly many countries even in the Asia-Pacific Region are falling behind in reaching the goals. Take the case of MDG Goal-2 i. e. education. Except North and Central Asian countries, rest of them as per the Asia Pacific Regional Report 2009/10, are behind in achieving this goal. It is not only that they are finding difficulty in getting everyone into the classroom, quality education is also a

serious problem. Worse still, poor education outcomes have terribly pernicious multiplier effects on things like poverty, health, gender equality and the environment. Fortunately, the reverse is also true.

Although there has been significant progress in achieving the MDG-2, the Universal Primary Education in South and West Asia, the progress has been mixed in East Asia and the Pacific. Nearly 18 million is still out of school in South and West Asia, and some 8 million are out of school in East Asia and the Pacific. The situation among the minority, ethnic and tribal group is far worse. And in the area of adult literacy rate, South and West Asia still accounts for more than half of 796 million illiterate adults world wide. An estimated 412 million adults lack basic literacy and numeracy skills in the region. Gender disparities contribute to high illiteracy rates, with women accounting for 63% of South and West Asia's adult illiterate population.

In addition, millions of school children leave or drop out school before gaining the most basic literacy and numeracy skills. Poor quality education jeopardize the future of young children increasing the risk of lifelong illiteracy and poverty. We all know that teachers are the single most important resource in delivering quality education, yet in many of the countries in the region there is acute shortage of qualified teachers. The consequences of no education or poor education is simply enormous, more so in this competitive globalize world where knowledge is power, wealth and prosperity.

MDG goals 1 reducing poverty and underweight children, MDG-2 achieving Universal Primary Education, MDG-3 achieving gender equality and women empowerment, MDG-4 reducing under 5 and infant mortality rate, MDG-5 ensuring antenatal care and birth by skilled professionals, MDG-6 prevention of HIV/AIDS and TB, and MDG-7 ensuring safe drinking water, total sanitation, reducing carbon emission, protection of environment and forest and ensuring sustainable development are linked to education. Take education and poverty. A recent study found evidence that each additional year of schooling adds an

extra 10% to an average person's earnings and it can lift average annual GDP by 0.37%. Question is, do we want to lift 800 million people out of poverty — 13 percent of the world total? If we want to do it, there is no better alternative but imparting education and more so, quality education.

Secondly, there is a direct link between education and women empowerment. Educate women and they will achieve their goal — they would know how to stand up for their rights and better care for their children. Look at Bangladesh. The educated mothers are highly empowered and they have less illiterate or unnourished children. Their children are not only better educated, they have better nutrition and they are better placed in the society. They achieve economically stable life. Consider Indonesia, where the number of children who get vaccinated jumps to 68 percent when they are born to mothers that make it to secondary school, from just 19 percent when they are born to mothers with no education. Even basic literacy has a huge impact; children with literate mothers are 50 percent more likely to live beyond age 5.

Lethal diseases such as HIV/AIDS can neither be prevented nor treated without proper education. Protecting the environment, another Millennium Development Goal, is as much about changing mindsets as it is about, say, reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is education and education that is more or less a sure way to accomplish this goal.

If developing countries must continue to improve performance in educating their people, it is imperative that their development partners, for their part, have to become even more generous and committed. In 2010 alone, their shortfall to their 0.7% ODA commitment exceeded over \$20 billion, almost 20%. UNESCO reports that meeting the Education for All goals in poor countries will require aid of \$16 billion per year, far more than the \$2 billion received in 2008. Question is — is it a tall order, particularly in today's cash-strapped environment?

It sounds interesting that the Swiss government provides subsidy of \$7 a week or nearly \$2,555 a year for each cow in Switzerland. Can they redistribute a part of it for education of poor countries? As per US National Priority Project, out of \$2628 billion revenue received from taxes in 2007, \$1105b or 42% was spent for military while only \$115b or 4% was spent for education, training, social service, elementary, secondary and higher education in USA in 2007. Professor Jeffrey Sachs, Special MDG Advisor to UN Secretary General, disclosed that the US government alone spent \$110 billion in 2010 in Afghanistan. This proves that even when we have financial meltdown, financing is possible provided there is political will and commitment, provided there is a mindset.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear: continued progress depends on recipient governments and donors alike placing education at the heart of their agenda. ECOSOC itself will continue to prioritize education in coming years, with work on cross-cutting issues like employment, poverty alleviation, gender mainstreaming, technology transfer, social inclusion and sustainable development.

Distinguished guests,

The outcomes and recommendations which emerge from these ongoing discussions, including today's event, will form the basis of ECOSOC's deliberations in July, and will assist the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Council. Today's meeting provides a prime opportunity to influence the debate — let's make the most of it. Remember, past is history, future is mystery and the present is a gift of God. Therefore, make best use of it. If we fail to deliver and fail to achieve the goals, will the history pardon us?

Thank you