



The Assistant Director-General for External Relations and Cooperation

**Opening speech by Mr Ahmed Sayyad
on the occasion of the Regional Parliamentary Conference for Education
in the Asia Pacific
(24 October, Jakarta, Indonesia)**

The Hon. Dr Agung Laksono, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia;

Dr Arief Rachman, Executive Chairman of the Indonesian National Commission for UNESCO

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, I would like to welcome each and every one of you to this first Regional Parliamentary Conference for Education in Asia and the Pacific organized by UNESCO. Let me begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to our host, the Government of Indonesia and, in particular Professor Bambang Sudibyo, the Minister of National Education of Indonesia, who will join us later today, and Dr Arief Rachman, Executive Chairman of the Indonesian National Commission for UNESCO for the excellent arrangements and the warm hospitality extended to all of us.

Allow me also to express my appreciation to the Hon. Agung Laksono, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia for his support. I am equally delighted by the presence of the representatives of our long-time partners, the World Bank, UNDP and UNICEF, who have kindly accepted to speak about their Organizations' perspectives on Education for All at this meeting.

I thank all the participants for honouring with your presence this meeting which confirms the importance that UNESCO attaches to its partnership with the parliamentary world and to the fresh momentum we hope to offer this alliance in the field of education in the Asia and the Pacific region. Your presence here today as decision makers, as political leaders and as representatives of your communities reflects the commitment and dynamism that you are willing to lend to the development of national education systems and testifies to your will to join the efforts of UNESCO in attaining the Education for All (EFA) goals.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the dawn of the 21st century, and after more than 60 years since the establishment of the United Nations and UNESCO, it is essential for us to consider how we can further consolidate our relations with the civil society in order for the UN system to be more effective and relevant taking into consideration the major changes at global level that have occurred in the last decades. We believe that multilateralism remains the most efficient system for addressing global problems. By expanding the roles of civil society in the deliberation process, we aim to enhance the accountability, integrity and legitimacy of our actions.

The role of civil society is complementary to that of government and UNESCO has always promoted fruitful partnerships among the civil society actors in the process of fulfilling its missions.

Distinguished Parliamentarians, there are diverse and significant roles that you can play in the field of education. You have the influence to give practical achievements to the constitutional goals of UNESCO. You are in a position to directly influence the framing of the national laws and to ensure that adequate funds are allocated to national education budgets. You have the power to be spokespersons for EFA within your own country and community on behalf of national and local educational needs, to ensure that the EFA goals are reflected in national legislative framework and to see to it that appropriate educational policies are in place.

I would like to quote our Director-General Mr Koïchiro Matsuura: *“As the elected representatives of the people, from the world over, Parliamentarians are (...) the natural and essential partners of UNESCO in its efforts to improve the quality of life everywhere through education, science, culture and communication.”*

In this context, UNESCO and the Inter-Parliamentary Union signed a cooperation agreement to establish a link among parliamentarians back in 1997. Today, we seek to fully develop our partnership with Parliamentarians in Asia and the Pacific region by establishing a network through which we hope to advance the cause of education.

This meeting seeks to establish a Forum of Asia Pacific Parliamentarians for Education (FASPPED) which would serve as a platform to associate Parliamentarians more closely with the planning and implementation of educational policies by governments to reach the Education for All objectives. The mission of this Forum is to increase the Parliamentarians' awareness of UNESCO's action in the field of Education which is high on the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals. We hope that this Forum will create a network for exchange of ideas and sharing of best practices in educational policy making. Through this Forum, we will also aim to promote a better understanding amongst parliamentarians of the issues and challenges in educational development, and EFA in particular, both at regional and national levels.

FASPPED will be the third Forum of its kind after the launching of the Forum of African Parliamentarians for Education (FAPED) and the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians for Education (FARPEd) respectively in 2002 and 2007. Their activities have no doubt helped to reinforce the network of Parliamentarians supporting the cause of education in their respective regions.

The strengthening of our cooperation with the Parliamentarians in Asia and the Pacific through FASPPED is a promising prospect to which I plan to lend my full support. I am confident that UNESCO and FASPPED, through our enhanced collaboration and with the assistance from other UN partners and civil society, can ensure that the Asia and the Pacific region, where almost half the humanity lives, is one where quality education is accessible to all.

Let me conclude by expressing my gratitude once again to the Government of Indonesia and to all the participants for joining UNESCO to work together for the achievement of the EFA goals in the region. I look forward to fruitful discussions and meetings during the coming two days.

Thank you for your attention.