Honorable Dato’ P. Kamalanathan P. Panchanathan, Deputy Minister of Education I of Malaysia,
Honorable Ministers and Vice-Ministers of the participating countries;
Distinguished delegates;
Dear Co-organizers, colleagues;
Ladies and gentlemen;

I am honoured to be standing here now, at the conclusion of the closing of three days of intensive and productive discussions on early childhood care and education.

Let me begin by expressing my profound gratitude to the Government of Malaysia for generously hosting this important Forum. I must particularly thank the Chair of the Steering Committee, Tan Sri Dr. Madinah Mohamad, Secretary-General, whose strong leadership was indispensable to the very successful organization of the Forum. I also wish to thank all delegates, experts and participants who came to Putrajaya with vision, ideas and commitment. And, I must not forget to thank our co-organizers, UNICEF and
ARNEC, whose close cooperation and partnership made the Forum a great success.

These three days, I have been very inspired by the energy of the ECCE community and the commitment you have shown through your presentations and discussions. It gives me great pride to be part of this very honorable cause for advancing the case for early childhood care and education in this region.

Sustainable Development Goal 4.2 seeks to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education, so that they are ready for primary education and learning throughout life. This target is ambitious, comprehensive and holistic. Taking it forward means changing our mindsets and embracing innovative approaches that capitalize on the transformative power of ECCE. As Dr. Kagan mentioned, we must think big, think far and think different to build a better, more peaceful world for our children.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It takes a village to raise a child. Although governments have the ultimate obligation to ensure the right of every child to quality early childhood care and education, ECCE must be everyone’s business; all stakeholders at national and regional levels have a shared responsibility and need to actively take part in building inclusive, equitable, sustainable and high-quality ECCE systems. As Datin Paduka Seri Rosmah Mansor, PERMATA Patron and wife of the Prime Minister noted, “It is our collective responsibility as parents,
guardians, NGOs, governments, and citizens of the world to develop and nurture the children from the earliest age possible.” ECCE cannot function in a silo when it comes to reaching marginalized children or providing stronger monitoring mechanisms.

We have taken great strides, and I am convinced that we can do even more to strengthen our village, our ECCE community here in Asia-Pacific, and make the SDG 4.2 a reality by drawing on many of the innovative practices and initiatives that have been shared over the past three days. The Putrajaya Declaration is the starting point for this joint effort.

The Declaration will strengthen existing strategies and partnerships to address multiple factors of disadvantage, professionalize ECCE teachers and caregivers and expand the provision of quality ECCE services to all children. It will guide us to develop innovative approaches, creative solutions and coordination mechanisms to support parents and teachers, promote holistic development and improve the well-being of young children. It will also increase investments and the efficient use of resources in ECCE and guide our efforts in monitoring our progress towards SDG target 4.2.

Delegates and colleagues,

We must do all in our power to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 for the present and future generations. ECCE is the foundation of lifelong learning and sits at the heart of this process. UNESCO as the global lead agency for SDG4-Education 2030, is fully committed to supporting Member States’ efforts to expand and improve comprehensive ECCE so that
it optimizes the potential of young children in the Asia and Pacific region. We need partners to turn today’s commitments into tomorrow’s reality. I appeal to you to join forces with UNESCO and our partners, for the future of early childhood care and education, and increase our collective chances of achieving every single SDGs.

Together, let’s build a village worthy of our children. I count on your leadership, and I count on your support. I thank you for your engagement, for your commitment, for your inspiration, and I look forward to working with you in the near future.

Thank you.

Terima Kasih.