

2ND ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL EDUCATION MINISTER'S CONFERENCE (APREMC II)

5-7 JUNE 2022, SHANGRI-LA HOTEL BANGKOK, THAILAND

**Statements at the Press Conference
6 June 2022, 10:40 – 11:00 (Bangkok, GMT+7)**

H.E. Ms Treenuch Thienthong, Minister of Education, Thailand and the Chair of the National Commission for UNESCO

Distinguished members of the media and guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. Thank you for joining us today. I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude, on behalf of the Ministry of Education of Thailand, to Her Royal Highness Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, for graciously presiding over the Opening Ceremony of the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Ministers Conference this morning. Her Royal Highness's contribution to education has long been recognized at national, regional, and global levels. Particularly, as a UNESCO's Goodwill Ambassador, Her Royal Highness has dedicated a lot of time and effort to education development and the welfare of children in disadvantaged and remote areas both in Thailand and in neighboring countries. In my capacity as Minister of Education, I will put every effort into following Her Royal Highness' guidance in delivering an all-rounded educational approach, as well as to fulfil her royal education initiatives to ensure that all people will receive a quality education.

In relation to this, the Ministry of Education is pleased to co-host the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Ministers Conference (APREMC II) in cooperation with UNESCO, UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, Cultures, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan from June 5-7, 2022. The Conference is timely organized when all countries in the Asia-Pacific region are of the view that we must work together to ensure education access to all during the COVID-19 education disruption. This conference will enable us to strengthen partnerships with education stakeholders in the region to ensure that our education systems will be redesigned to adapt to the post-COVID era and to achieve goal number 4 of the sustainable development goals.

Thailand values the importance of this because it brings together Ministers of Education in the Asia-Pacific region, educators, academics, experts, researchers, and representatives from education partners, to join forces in developing education as an essential tool for achieving a more sustainable world for everyone. During the Ministers' roundtable this afternoon, Ministers of Education will share their thoughts and show their visions on how they can transform education to accelerate the progress towards SDG4 in the region as well as to achieve learning recovery and improve learning outcomes for all. In relation to this, we will also develop the Bangkok Statement 2022 and its outcomes will be submitted to the SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee later this year. As the co-host of the Conference, we believe that the power of cooperation among education ministers and partners demonstrated during the Conference, will be a strong driving force to develop education for the greater benefit of all our citizens in the region.

Now, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Ministers of Education from the Asia-Pacific Region, who will share their worthwhile experiences, insights and wisdom during the APREMC II Conference. I would also like to thank Ms. Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili, the Chairperson of the Executive Board and Ms. Stefania Giannini, the Assistant Director-General for Education of UNESCO who will both join the Conference and share their insights and passion on how to move education forward in the region. Finally, this conference wouldn't have been possible without the support of our partners, UNESCO, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan, speakers, and all the guests involved. We are extremely grateful for all your support.

Thank you.

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H.E. Ms Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili, Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO

As we emerge from the pandemic that brought the world to a halt, we can begin to see that returning back to normal as we knew it is no longer possible. In education systems throughout Asia-Pacific as well as in all other regions around the world, the pandemic has revealed and exacerbated existing challenges and vulnerabilities.

Education remains a cornerstone of both social and economic recovery, as well as achieving the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which has been seriously jeopardized by the pandemic. The 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference (APREMC-II) provides an important regional forum and mechanism for keeping education a top priority of all our Asia-Pacific Member States.

The findings of this Conference, which takes place this week here in Bangkok, will not only chart the way forward in terms of regional momentum and cooperation for learning recovery; in addition, they will feed directly into the upcoming UN *Transforming Education Pre-Summit* at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in June, as well as the UN *Transforming Education Summit* at UN Headquarters in New York in September.

I am truly delighted that UNESCO continues to play a critically important and catalyzing role in bringing together and leading efforts nationally, regionally, and globally which contribute towards mobilization and stakeholder commitment to education around the world.

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Ms. Stefania Giannini, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education

We are united here in Bangkok by a collective sense of urgency in the face of the impact of the COVID-19 across this immense and diverse region. Although governments took rapid and innovative actions to ensure learning continuity, school closures ranging from 8 to over 35 weeks hit the most vulnerable and marginalized children and youth the hardest and amplified inequalities. Reliance on technology for learning made the digital divide a major factor of exclusion. Millions of children across the region are at risk of not returning to school. We cannot let this happen: the costs are too high for individuals and societies. This crisis is a clarion call to make our education systems more inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

Education must be prioritized in the recovery and in every development plan as a human right and global public good, backed up with adequate resources.

The Conference provides a forum to share lessons learnt, drawing on innovations made during the crisis, and lead a policy dialogue to identify solutions and collectively commit to action. The goal is not only to recover lost learning, but to re-imagine education for a more just and sustainable future in the region. UNESCO's Futures of Education Report provides a frame for this with its call to forge a new social contract for education to repair past injustices and chart a more inclusive course for people and planet.

Today, as more than 20 ministers and vice-ministers from across the region gather in Bangkok at APREMC-II, together with high-level UN officials, CSOs, academics, youth representatives and other key education stakeholders, we see the strong will in the Asia-Pacific to jointly address the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on learning, one that could set back decades of progress if left unchecked. This is a public responsibility and a shared societal endeavour.

The outcomes of this Conference will inform the UN Secretary-General's Transforming Education Summit, which offers a tremendous opportunity to mobilize ambition, action, solutions and solidarity to accelerate efforts towards SDG4 and prepare our societies for a better future.

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Ms. Debora Comini, Director, UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific

Good morning, everyone. As we now know, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the largest disruption of education systems in history. It has exacerbated an already deteriorating learning crisis and deepened pre-existing education inequalities across our Asia-Pacific countries.

To tackle these very real challenges, we must ensure that every child receives the support they need, so they can return to school safely and catch up on lost learning as soon as possible.

Recognizing the need to accelerate learning recovery with urgent, at-scale action, UNICEF in partnership with UNESCO and the World Bank have been monitoring various measures taken by countries to mitigate learning losses. Based on the emerging lessons, we are calling on all regional governments and partners to take RAPID action by:

- Reaching and retaining every child in school;
- Assessing learning levels;
- Prioritizing teaching the fundamentals;
- Increasing catch-up learning and making progress beyond what was lost; and
- Developing psychosocial health and well-being so that every child is ready to learn.

We are proud that in the Asia-Pacific region, we have the longstanding collaborative platform and partnership that have made this Conference possible. This is an invaluable opportunity for us to reflect together on how to successfully facilitate safe return to schools, recover from learning loss, and address learning crises, all while aspiring to transform education and its systems with newfound resilience for the long-term.

Every child has the right to reach their full learning potential. We cannot sit back and allow a generation of children to miss out on their learning and full development. *We must act now.* To achieve this, UNICEF is committed to working with all stakeholders – the Ministries of Education, development partners, civil society, youth, private sector and academia – to do everything we can to protect children – especially the most vulnerable and marginalized – from further learning losses, and help all children and youth realize their rights to thrive in the future.

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Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

Good morning everyone!

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused an unprecedented disruption to education in all parts of Asia and the Pacific. The pandemic has not only severely impacted education delivery; learning outcomes; student engagement, and student health and well-being; just as significantly, it has significantly set back progress made prior to 2019 towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the region – in particular SDG 4. While the full extent of learning loss as a result of school closures has not yet been fully mapped, country studies from the region already available show alarming increases in the proportion of students who fail to meet minimum proficiency levels in reading and mathematics.

The 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference is an important and timely opportunity to bring together ministers from 46 Member States and education stakeholders across the Asia-Pacific to collectively commit to concrete action and partnerships. This collaboration will be captured in the collective 'Bangkok Statement 2022' to be formally adopted tomorrow, a statement which will constitute a 'roadmap' for a region seeking to rebuild and transform its ailing education systems.

Following the theme '*Education Recovery and Transformation towards more Responsive, Relevant and Resilient Education Systems: Accelerating progress towards SDG 4-Education 2030*', the Conference will take stock of, and analyze progress made in the region towards SDG 4 since the 2015 adoption of the SDG4-Education 2030 Agenda. The Conference will further provide a platform for advancing stronger collaboration and regional exchange for the future pursuit of priority actions that will enable children, adolescents, youth and adults across Asia and the Pacific to develop their full potential as productive and healthy citizens of the world community.
