Sawadeekap. Good morning. 안녕하세요. On behalf of the conference organizers, it gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to the 5th International Conference on Language and Education: Sustainable Development through Multilingual Education.

First, on behalf of UNESCO Bangkok and conference organizers, I would like to express our condolences to all Thai people, including our friends and participants here today, on the passing of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. His Majesty was a pillar of stability and deeply revered for his dedication to improving the lives of all Thai people regardless of their background – uniting Thai society from the rich urban elite to poor rural farmers.

His Majesty’s works extended to some of the most remote reaches of the kingdom – areas that are, in many cases, home to ethnic groups. Thailand is home to many such groups, who speak more than 70 languages. The multitude of royal projects initiated under His Majesty’s reign have benefited millions of people across the country, resonating particularly strongly among minority language speakers, including Thai-Muslims, hill tribes and other ethnic groups.

His Majesty’s legacy is an inspiration – let us carry it forward. I hope our gathering here today is a step in that direction.

The 5th International Conference on Language and Education comes amid tremendous momentum for mother-tongue based multilingual education in the region. UNESCO is proud of its work as co-chair, along with UNICEF, of the Asia-Pacific Multilingual Education Working Group.
Many of the group’s members are here with us today. Your hard work and commitment has been instrumental in spearheading some of the efforts that have made this region a global leader in MTB-MLE policy, practice and research.

The MTB-MLE movement has grown stronger in Asia-Pacific since we last met three years ago, with the past year particularly exciting.

February’s highly successful Conference on Language Policy in Multicultural and Multilingual Settings in Myanmar was followed by the International Conference on Inclusive Education and Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education in the Philippines, where participants discussed ways to integrate existing MLE-related practices and policies into the SDG and Education 2030 agenda. The Philippines, it should be noted, has been a regional leader in institutionalizing MTB-MLE.

In March, the government of Cambodia launched the Multilingual Education National Action Plan (MENAP), one of the most comprehensive programmes of its kind, providing a roadmap to expand MTB-MLE to reach more ethnic minority children in Cambodia. Thank you, H.E. Ton Sa Im and the government of Cambodia, for your strong commitment, which has made Cambodia another regional role model in the field of multilingual education.

In September, participants at the Second Malaysian Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education: Bringing Languages, Cultures and Peoples Together shared their experiences, successes and challenges in MTB-MLE and the preservation of indigenous languages and cultures.

And that brings us to our conference today, a time to celebrate the achievements of the journey that has brought us here and also to prepare ourselves to embark on a new chapter at a pivotal time in global education.

The 17 goals under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are universal, ambitious and offer a transformative vision of a better world. It is an agenda for the people, an agenda for the planet and an agenda for shared prosperity, peace and partnership. Education is a primary driver of development and lies at the heart of our ability to achieve all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our ambitious universal education agenda is rooted in SDG 4, which calls on all countries to, “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” MTB-MLE is vital in this regard, as it makes education systems more relevant and responsive to cultural and linguistic diversity. This approach is undeniably at the heart of inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.

We know the importance of MTB-MLE to achieving SDG 4. Now it is incumbent upon us all to combine our shared knowledge and resources to ensure that this potential is fully realized.
Over the next three days, you will share successes and challenges in your respective contexts that will help us develop advocacy materials on how MTB-MLE can contribute to achieving SDG 4 and we will work together to assist member states in integrating this approach into their SDG 4 implementation action plans.

Following the conference, UNESCO will host a one-day high level closed-door policy forum, during which policy-makers from throughout the region will join UN agencies, NGOs, bilateral cooperation agencies and intergovernmental organizations for a frank discussion on the conference’s outputs and share knowledge and discuss strategies aimed at ensuring that today’s momentum carries over into tomorrow’s success stories.

Ladies and gentleman,

It is fitting that this conference is taking place in Thailand, home to a MTB-MLE programme recently celebrated by UNESCO. This year’s UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize was awarded to Thailand’s Mahidol University for its Patani Malay-Thai Bi/Multilingual Education Project. My congratulations to Mahidol and the government of Thailand on this honour. The award recognizes innovations in the promotion of literacy, giving special consideration to the development and use of mother-tongue literacy education and training and is named after a king who reigned in my country, Korea, during the 15th century Joseon Dynasty, but whose legacy continues to this day.

King Sejong is credited with many landmark achievements over the course of his reign including the creation of *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet. The development of Hangeul as well as printing technology advances transformed the lives of everyday people, making literacy and its benefits accessible to all for the first time and leading directly to the high literacy rate and advances in IT that define modern Korea.

King Sejong’s achievements were echoed in Thailand by King Ram Khamhaeng, whose Inscription of 1292AD is included on UNESCO’s Memory of the World Register and records the 13th century monarch’s role in creating the Thai scripts that form the basis of the language as we know it today.

We are here today with a rich legacy of shared experiences and cultures to share as well as a modern-day mission that is pressing and requires a new vision and a new approach. I trust that we can achieve this together.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our partners, UNICEF EAPRO, UNICEF ROSA, SEAMEO Secretariat, Mahidol University, CARE, Save the Children and SIL International who worked tirelessly over the past year to bring this conference to life.
I once again welcome you to the conference and wish you success in sharing experiences and knowledge that you will bring back to your own communities and countries to improve the lives of ethnolinguistic minority children.

Thank you. Kob Khun Kap. 감사합니다.