

**Opening Statement by Mr. Balananda Paudel,
Secretary, Ministry of Education and Sports, Government of Nepal**

Asia-Pacific Meeting of UNGEI Global Advisory Committee
11-12 June, Kathmandu, Nepal

- Ma. Penina Mlama, UNGEI GAC co-chair and Executive Director CAMFED,
- Ms. Frances Turner, Deputy Regional Director UNICEF ROSA,
- Mr. Tony Burdon, Deputy Head of DFID,
- Ms. Cheryl Gregory Faye, Head of UNGEI Global Secretariat,
- Ms. Reshmi Chowdhary, Biratnagar Child Club,
- Distinguished delegates,
- Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be part of this Asia-Pacific Meeting of UNGEI Global Advisory Committee, with its theme on “Equity, Gender and Quality in Education”. We are honoured that you have agreed to meet in Kathmandu to deliberate on and find strategies towards achieving our common goals of education for all.

Many of you have come from far away and have taken long and difficult routes to be with us here today. For some, this may be the first in Nepal. On this occasion, I, on behalf of the Government of Nepal, Ministry of Education and Sports, and on my own behalf would like to extend a warm welcome to you all.

I also take this opportunity to thank our colleagues in the Steering Committee for their wonderful support and cooperation to make this event take place in this form.

We are pleased to share with you that visible gains have been made in securing girls’ access to education; the gender gap is closing. Nonetheless, a substantial number of girls are under-served, and a few remain yet to be served. There is more to be done.

Some of you have the opportunity to visit our schools in different parts of the country, and you may be well aware of the challenges we are facing in relation to girls education, female teachers, textbooks, classrooms, infrastructure, medium of instruction and the like. We are glad to share with you some of our achievements, as well as constraints.

Education, however, is not only about numbers, nor about financial resources alone. “Education for all” involves responsive policy intents, planning, and implementation. For us “education for all” means - equitable, gender sensitive and good quality education.

Education for all is also about collaboration and dialogues with stakeholders, institutions and partners. In this process we are learning from each other, bringing in our specific skills and experiences, and working together towards a common goal. That is why the United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative is relevant to Nepal, and the theme of equity, gender and quality becomes so important for all of us.

Our Interim Constitution recognizes education as a fundamental human right. Our priorities are geared towards ensuring equitable access of girls who are facing deprivations and are confronting multiple exclusions. With a view to adopting a targeted approach with incentivized interventions, a strategy paper for girls’ education was developed in 2006 as an overarching framework. This august gathering will further enrich our knowledge and will prove instrumental in streamlining our efforts. We look forward to working more closely with you to face the challenges we have, with greater clarity and precision in our goals.

I hope the meeting will be productive and useful with outcomes we can all benefit from. While you are here, I also hope you will have sometime to go around and meet the people and share each other’s experiences.

I wish you a meaningful and a pleasant stay in Nepal.

Thank you.