

**Vice President's Address to the Chairman of the Opening Ceremony
by Professor Napatawn Banchuin, Vice President, Mahidol University
at the International Conference on
Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
Tuesday, 9 of November 2010
Twin Towers Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand**

Your Excellency Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great privilege to welcome you all to the **International Conference on Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals**. First of all, I would like to express my deep gratitude to the consortium of organizations from the Asia Multilingual Education Working Group, including: UNESCO, UNICEF, SEAMEO, Mahidol University, SIL International, Save the Children, CARE, Asia Pacific Basic and Adult Education, Asia Institute of Technology and the Royal Institute of Thailand, for their gracious support in preparing for this Conference. We are grateful for their continuous efforts in supporting ethnolinguistic minorities, and raising awareness of the relevance of local languages in achieving education and development goals. Programs and policies that better reach these underserved groups are key to the ambitions of all the organizations represented here today.

Despite aggregate gains worldwide in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA), the state of development for the world's ethnolinguistic minorities continues to lag behind, putting them at risk of even greater disparities that hinder efforts to overcome poverty, illiteracy and disease; as well as increasing the likelihood of conflict arising from exclusion.

Your Excellency, the vast majority of the planning, monitoring and evaluation of efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All, however,

makes minimal mention of ethnolinguistic minorities, even as they are disproportionately affected by many of the most pressing social challenges.

The global development community needs a strategic plan of action to address this disparity, including: strategies that integrate local languages and cultures into the development process for greater access and quality; data collection indicators and methodology that specifically disaggregate development gains to track the progress of ethnolinguistic minorities relative to their majority counterparts; and mechanisms to ensure greater participation and a voice for ethnolinguistic minority communities in decision-making for development.

For ethnolinguistic minorities to be effectively included in global campaigns such as the Millennium Development Goals, awareness raising and capacity building is needed with the full spectrum of development actors (governments, non-governmental organizations, multilateral agencies and donor institutions) regarding the interrelationship between language, education and development, as well as strategies for including a strong focus on ethnolinguistic minorities in national education and development planning.

Since 2004, the Bangkok-based Multilingual Education (MLE) Working Group has worked collaboratively to raise awareness regarding persistent inequalities in the educational attainment of ethnolinguistic minorities, and to promote good practices in increasing access and quality of education for these disadvantaged groups. A significant contribution of the working group has been in the hosting of two international conferences on Language Development, Language Revitalization, and Multilingual Education in Ethnolinguistic Communities, which some of the participants here today may have attended in 2003 and 2008. As such, you are certainly aware of how highly successful the conferences were in attracting representation from countries in Asia and around the world, thus raising the profile of multilingual education as essential to achieving inclusive education for all and the value of preserving minority languages as an integral part of intangible cultural heritage.

Recognizing that multilingual education is most relevant when strongly integrated with a broader framework of education, development and improved quality of life for ethnolinguistic minorities, the Multilingual Education (MLE) Working Group has selected

the broad theme of "Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals" for the 2010 conference.

Your Excellency, languages are more than tools for communication; they help shape the identity of individuals and groups, as well as serving as a key element in social integration and cultural development. As such, languages are also strategically important for the attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA).

Our meeting **here** over the next 3 days has a number of special purposes which include enhancing, understanding and inspiring action on issues related to education **access** and the development of ethnolinguistic communities.

In this respect, I sincerely hope that this conference – building on the legacy of the previous conference and supported by even more organizations and institutions at this time – will provide an opportunity to continue moving towards global solutions and taking the required initiatives.

So, Your Excellency, on behalf of the organizers of this International Conference on Language, Education and the Millennium Development Goals, I welcome you and wish this convention every success and thank you for your honored participation.
