**Opening Remarks**

 **Mr. Nyi Nyi Thaung, Team Leader for SDG 4 Coordination, Education Policy and Planning and Quality Education,
Education Section, UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok**

**30 September 2024, Time: 8:00-12:00**

**Venue: ICT building, Ministry of Education and Sports**

* Associate Professor Vongdeuan Osay, Acting Director-General of the Department of Teacher Education, the Chair
* Ms. Vanessa Hegarty, First Secretary, Australian Embassy, my Co-Chair
* Distinguished officials from relevant Departments of the Ministry of Education and Sports.
* Representatives from Universities, Teacher Training Colleges, Development Partners, International and National Non-government Organizations, and Non-Profit Associations.
* Sabaidee. Good morning to you all.

On behalf of Ms. Soohyun Kim, Regional Director of the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok, and the Education team led by Ms. Marina Patrier, Chief of Education, I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings and sincere respect to you all.

It is my honour to co-convene this sixth meeting of the Teacher Education Focal Group, in collaboration with the Department of Teacher Education and the Australian Embassy. I am also privileged to be here alongside Associate Professor Vongdeuan Osay and Ms. Vanessa Hegarty, who serve as Chair and Co-chair, respectively. As we gather for the final meeting of this year, I would like to take a moment to express our deepest gratitude to Mr. Keth Phanhlack. His instrumental role in establishing this Focal Group and chairing the previous five meetings over the past two years cannot be overstated. We applaud his dedication and commitment, and while we wish him all the best in his future endeavors, we trust he will continue to champion the cause of teacher education in Lao PDR.

I would also like to acknowledge the continued leadership of Ajarn Vongdeuan, who now assumes the role of Director-General of the Department of Teacher Education. We look forward to working under your esteemed guidance as we continue advancing our shared goals.

Together, we are striving to ensure that every learner in Lao PDR has access to and benefits from inclusive, quality education, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, our efforts come at a time when education faces unprecedented challenges both regionally and globally — insufficient education financing, declining learning outcomes, and the impact of conflict, social unrest, intolerance, and the ongoing climate crisis, to name a few. This makes the need for education that fosters peaceful, just, and sustainable societies more urgent than ever. At the heart of this are key questions about what young people learn and how they learn. These questions were central to discussions at the recent 6th Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED 6) in Bangkok. The principles of equity, inclusion, and gender equality must remain central to our response.

In this rapidly changing world, digital technology is essential to safeguarding education as a fundamental human right, particularly in times of crisis. We eagerly anticipate the launch of the Digital Strategy for Education and Sports 2025–2035, which will guide the transformation of Lao PDR’s education sector through ICT. This strategy promises to improve the quality of education, expand access, and enhance sectoral efficiency.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is also reshaping how we live, work, and learn. Education systems globally are striving to keep pace with this change. Earlier this month, UNESCO launched two new AI competency frameworks—one for students and one for teachers—during the Digital Learning Week in Paris. UNESCO and other development partners stand ready to support efforts in Lao PDR to equip students and teachers with the skills to harness AI’s potential while understanding its risks. This will enable them to engage with AI in a safe, ethical, and responsible manner, both in education and beyond.

Today’s meeting provides an important platform to address several pressing teacher-related issues, including the ongoing flood situation in Luang Namtha, Huaphan, and Vientiane Capital, and its impact on the education sector. We will also receive updates on the Department of Teacher Education’s 2024 action plan, reflections on the piloting of formative assessments, and plans for 2024-2025. In addition, we will explore the use of ICT in primary-level mathematics instruction and be introduced to the revised Grade 1 Teacher Guide for the Spoken Lao Programme.

I encourage all participants to actively engage, share insights, and offer constructive feedback during our discussions. On behalf of the Co-chairs, I wish you a productive and insightful meeting, enriched by the collective wisdom of all participants, whether attending in person or online.

Thank you. Khob Chai Lai Lai.