

**Address by the Rt. Honorable Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli  
to the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on Early Childhood Development (ECD)  
and  
Third Asia- Pacific Regional Policy Forum on Early Childhood Care and Education  
(ECCE)**

Mr. Chairman

Honorable Ministers representing different friendly countries from the Asia-Pacific region

Delegates

Representatives from the UN agencies

Ladies and gentlemen.

At the outset, let me express our appreciation for choosing Kathmandu as the venue for this Asia-Pacific Regional Conference and the Regional Policy Forum.

I welcome you all to this beautiful and peaceful country of Nepal.

Let me share some of my thoughts on the topic of today's conference and its importance to the countries in the Asia Pacific region.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Capable human resource is critical for the development of a country. Development of such human resource depends on proper care and education we impart on the children of today. It is for this reason adage goes that "today's children are the stars of future". The experience from the world demonstrates that the countries that have accorded higher priority on early childhood development (ECD) and child care have been able to achieve prosperity. Today's children will contribute for the good of a country in future. In Nepal too, we have accorded high priority to this sector to ultimately achieve the goal of "prosperous Nepal and happy Nepali".

As shown by researches, children's life beginning from the period of conception to the eight years of age is crucial for their development. It is because that almost 90 per cent of human brain is developed by the age of five. For holistic development of children, they require proper food, nutrition, health care, education and protection. It becomes our responsibility to ensure all these basic services to the children to ensure their optimal development.

Issues related to children are interconnected and cross-cutting. They require proper coordination among the various entities and their plans and programs. They all must be geared to attain optimal level of achievements and effectiveness in the interventions meant for the development of the children.

I may recall that the World Conference on “Education for All” held in 1990 had recognized early childhood care as a major goal to be achieved. Government of Nepal has been promoting ECD through various programmatic interventions in line with our international commitment to “quality education for all”.

This year the Government has initiated a massive enrollment campaign to ensure that all school going children are admitted to schools and are retained there to complete the minimum required level. Under the campaign of "enrollment of one child is my social responsibility", prominent personalities in the national life and social organizations have provided guardianship to the children coming from economically poor background. I was myself actively involved in this campaign. We have given prominence to the right of every child to have education opportunity. Through this campaign, the government entities are active in ensuring school enrollment of close to five-hundred thousand children within this year who are out of school currently.

This campaign will continue throughout the year to ensure that every child is enrolled in a school. For that, we have made basic education mandatory and free of cost. Recently the Parliament has unanimously adopted the policy and program of the Government to this effect. The government's commitment to develop each school in the country as a child-friendly school has also been endorsed by both Houses of the Parliament.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

For the Government of Nepal, early childhood development is a constitutionally mandated priority. Nepal’s constitution has guaranteed holistic early childhood development for all children as their fundamental right. We have aligned our legal arrangements with that of constitutional provision and made one year pre-primary education free and basic education compulsory. Therefore, early childhood development remains at the centre of the Government's priority.

The Government of Nepal in collaboration with various national and international development partners has been continuously promoting ECD programs, such as, safe motherhood, golden thousand days, multi-sectoral nutrition plan and so forth. These programs are targeted for pregnant women and children under the age of two

years. We have set goals to reduce number of stunted children and significantly improve nourishment and nutrition level among all children. The government has formulated multi-sectoral nutrition plan with a view to reduce number of underweight and obese children.

Nearly one million children in Nepal are benefitting from early childhood education and development programs through more than 36 thousand ECD centers across the nation. These Children get opportunity for holistic development and they are prepared for school through these centers. Currently 84 per cent of the children below 5 years of age have received opportunity of early childhood development and education. Due to the success of ECD programs, net enrollment rate of the children between 1 to 5 years has reached 97 percent. Programs such as day lunch for the EDC children, provision of adequate number of teachers in such centers, and building of infrastructures have supported these efforts. Enhancing quality of these centers has remained our priority now.

ECD has already been coupled with basic education and mainstreamed in the education system of the country. We have now the challenge of enhancing quality of ECD centers and implementation of programs targeted to the children below 4 years of age. All the stakeholders involved in this important sector have the responsibility to expand their activities, enhance quality of their programs and improve delivery.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

I may underline that Nepal had achieved a number of child-related millennium development goals, including the child mortality and girl enrollment rate. Our journey to the implementation of the SDGs is built upon those achievements.

Nepal is now moving on a trajectory of prosperity and development. The goal is to lead the country to a path of sustainable development. We understand that quality early childhood development will play critical role to attain this national mission.

The Government of Nepal has solemnly promised that no child will be deprived from holistic early childhood development. This can only help realize ECD as basic rights of children as stated in the constitution. Therefore, we have chosen to implement ECD as a national campaign, so that no child of this age group is deprived of this opportunity.

Coordination and building synergy among the government and non-government stakeholders to achieve the results in the field of ECD is important. I am confident that the National Planning Commission, the Ministry of Education, Science and

Technology, the relevant ministries, the international development partners, and the civil society organizations will continue their efforts to achieve further effectiveness in this sector.

I reiterate Nepal's commitment towards achieving Sustainable Development goals, in particular its target 4.2 by 2030. For that, the current ECD programs will receive further prominence in the future plans of the Government. We will further develop necessary infrastructures in this sector. Recently approved multi-sectoral nutrition plans will be implemented in coordination with all relevant federal ministries.

**To conclude,** I am happy that this regional conference on ECD is taking place here in Nepal. I believe the conference will make useful contribution to the holistic development of children. Through this conference, all stakeholders involved in it will have the opportunity to exchange experiences to make it a key event for the holistic development of children in the Asia Pacific region.

I also believe the research-based presentations, exchange of best practices, and the opportunity for networking for early childhood development will further encourage all government, international organizations, civil society and individuals.

I appreciate those who have diligently involved in the preparation and coordination of this conference.

I wish for full a success of the conference.

I thank you all.