Dear ECD Colleagues, Friends from international organizations, and country representatives.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Good morning! I am very honored to be invited by UNICEF to attend this consultation on nurturing care for early childhood development. Please allow me to extend to you my congratulations on the release of the global report on ECD!

Life begins with childhood. As an old Chinese saying goes: a person's adulthood can be predicted when he is 3 years old, and his elderly life can be predicted when he is 7 years old. Early development is crucial for development throughout one's life span.

In China, there are about 100 million children under the age of 6. In recent years, the Chinese government has been increasingly prioritizing young children, with proactive and effective policy measures to promote ECD. The government has done this in two main ways.

Firstly, the government has been strengthening policy design and institutional arrangements to promote ECD. The National Program of Action for Child Development in China (2011-2020) outlines the government's programmatic lines of action for promoting integrated early childhood development for 0-3 year olds. In recent years, China has developed plans on health, national nutrition, family education and population development, safeguarding ECD in terms of sound childrearing, maternal and child healthcare, family nurturing, nutrition, education, reproductive health, community service and family policies, etc.

Secondly, the Chinese Government has also implemented, and continues to implement, major projects and programs to promote child development. An example of this is the three-stage preschool education action plan, which has been implemented from 2011 to 2017. Thanks to this initiative, by 2016, the Gross Enrollment Rate for three-year preschool education had reached 77.4%, an increase of 20.8 percentage points from 2010. Programs on free pre-pregnancy checkups, child nutrition improvement, disease screening, growth monitoring etc. are implemented to ensure maternal and child health. Breastfeeding week advocacy activities have now been held for 18 years in a row, and breastfeeding has been consistently supported and promoted by setting up and maintaining breastfeeding rooms in public places, government offices, enterprises and public institutions. Nutrition improvement programs for children are implemented in poor areas. Student nutrition improvement plans are also in place, benefiting 4.5 million children and achieving remarkable results; for example, with the help of nutrition supplementation packages, the stunting rate of 6-24 month old infants in Ledu District of Qinghai Province dropped by 28.8%. In a UNICEF supported programme in 4 poverty counties, through multi-sectoral joint efforts, community-based and family-oriented 0-3 ECD services have been established, offering
integrated ECD services on child development and growth, family nurturing, parenting, child play, etc. As a result of an integrated multi-sectoral approach to early childhood development the prevalence of suspected overall and domain specific developmental delays was reduced by up to 18% in intervention villages.

However, China still faces many challenges in promoting children's development and fully realizing children's rights. Urban and rural development are imbalanced, and rural children still lag behind in terms of their health, nutrition and education; both cities and rural areas have insufficient ECD service resources and community-based child services. In addition, after the implementation of the two-child policy, the supply of public facilities and service resources for the care of 0-3 year olds has not kept up with the increased demand, resulting in shortages. We would like to join hands with the United Nations and countries around the world, to keep promoting and bringing early childhood development to the forefront.

We will do this, firstly, by promoting and raising further the level of awareness regarding early childhood development as the most valuable human capital investment with the highest return to benefit children, families, and the country. We should invest more and earlier in early childhood development. In terms of legislation, policy making and public resource allocation, the promotion of early childhood development should be prioritized more than ever, and more proactive health and education oriented ECD policies and programmes shall be implemented.

Secondly, we will further develop inter-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration mechanisms to promote early childhood development. Collaboration amongst education, health, social welfare and social protection departments should be strengthened, and diversified ECD policies and targets coordinated, so as to offer an integrated service package for children's early development. Enterprises, public institutions, social organizations and charitable organizations shall be encouraged to participate in ECD work.

Thirdly, we will strengthen the family- and community-based ECD services system. Communities and families shall be better equipped to promote early childhood development and ECD shall be incorporated into the community public service system, offering guidance and services to families.

Fourthly, we will continue to provide guidance and regulations on early childhood development services, and to promote professional development.

We will continue to explore the pathways of early childhood development in line with China's characteristics. Let's join our hands to offer a good start and a bright future for every child.

Thank you!