Honorable Chief Guest, Minister of Education and Training, government officials, representatives of civil society and international NGOs, students,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning and Assalam-o-Alaikum,

I am pleased to be with you today to celebrate International Literacy Day 2013. This year’s focus is “Literacies in 21st Century”, which is very timely and relevant to Pakistan.

Literacy is a basic right and essential drive for human development. It paves the way to autonomy, the acquisition of skills, cultural expression and full participation in society.

Illiteracy in Pakistan has fallen over the two decades, thanks to the government and people of Pakistan for their efforts working toward meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Today, 70% of Pakistani people can read and write. In 20 years illiterate population has been reduced significantly.

In Pakistan today, primary school survival rate is 70%. Gender gap still exists with only 68% of girls’ survival rate compared to 71% for boys. According to a recently carried out survey, the most common reason in Pakistan for children (both boys and girls) of age 10 to 18 years leaving school before completing primary grade is “the child not willing to go to school”, which may be related to quality and learning outcome. However, and sadly, for the girls living in rural communities the second highest reason for dropout is “parents did not allow” which might be related to prejudice and cultural norm against girls.

Per student education expenditure in primary level (age 5-9) in Pakistan is Rs.6,500. The highest expenditure in Pakistan is in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where Rs. 8,638 is spent per student.
The proportion of population in Pakistan lacking basic reading and writing is too high. This is a serious obstacle for individual fulfillment, to the development of societies, and to mutual understanding between peoples.

The situation is exacerbated by the rise of new technologies and modern knowledge societies that make the ability to read and write all the more essential. Literacy is the key for acquiring knowledge, interpersonal skills, expertise and the ability to live together in community—all skills that are the foundations of modern society in the 21st century, more than ever before, literacy is the cornerstone of peace and development.

Literacy is much more than an educational priority—it is the ultimate investment in the future and the first step towards all the new forms of literacy required in the 21st century. On this International Literacy Day, we call on governments to work together to achieve this dream. This requires new funding, policies drawn up with the populations concerned, new and more innovative forms of action, taking full advantage of new technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Future of Pakistan is literate Pakistan—the country of educated men and women. UNESCO is always with you to achieve goal.

Thank you!