



## Thailand

Somchai Wongsawat  
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education



*Appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education on February 6, 2008, Mr. Somchai Wongsawat has previously served the Royal Thai Government as Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice and as Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Academic Division and later the Administration Division of the Ministry of Justice. He is a qualified Barrister-at-law and holds two Masters Degrees, one in Public Administration and another in Public and Private Management, from the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA).*

### **Inclusive Education: From Vision to Practice**

Recognizing that the special schools and additional services can only reach a fraction of those with special needs, inclusive education is an approach. Thailand has adopted to improve the overall quality of education through formal and informal systems of benefit all learners, nationwide.

The 1999 National Education Act of Thailand provided the necessary legislative framework to guarantee equal access to 12 years, free basic education of quality for all, including the disabled, disadvantaged, or those living in difficult circumstances. Initially, steps were taken to increase access to and enhance the quality of the country's many smaller schools, often located in rural areas. This was done through targeted financial assistance and the establishment of Model Schools which encouraged the sharing of resources and provided a system of support in terms of professional development.

In 2005, the first 309 inclusive education schools were established. Since then many schools that once prided themselves on being exclusive schools have been, and indeed are being transformed. Today, children from different backgrounds and with diverse learning needs have equal opportunities to enrol and to benefit from quality education. Through formal, and informal services, and with a range of partners, efforts have been made to ensure cultural freedom and language rights of the country's ethnic groups, and to include children with visual and hearing impairments as well as other physical disabilities and learning difficulties.

We have recently launched an outreach programme, giving teachers a key role in seeking out children from their communities who are not in school and finding ways to facilitate their participation. By ensuring the right to education, we aim to enhance quality of life, ensure economic well-being, promote meaningful participation, respect human dignity, and thus build a more cohesive society.