Mr and Mrs Ministers, yours Excellencies, ....

This session will focus on youth employment and we will discuss the two most important
aspects of youth employment:

- The first aspect concerns youth as a potential for economic growth and development.
In China millions of young people are entering into the working age population every
year. These millions of young people, well prepared for working life, represent an
enormous asset for China. They are the future of this country.
- The second aspect concerns the role of public policies for the successful integration of
these young people in the world of work. Here we will learn both about the Chinese
strategy for youth employment and about the Global Alliance for Youth Employment,
established under the leadership of the heads of the United Nations, the World Bank
and the ILO.

For this session, we have the privilege to have an expert panel of eminent experts and policy
makers, with deep knowledge of youth and youth employment in China and globally. It gives
me great pleasure to welcome:

Mr. Chikara Sakaguchi, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan
The Vice Minister of Education, China (to be confirmed)
Mr. Matthew Zhang, Labour Commissioner Hong Kong
Dr. Rosanna Wong, Member of High-Level Panel, UN Youth Employment Network,
and Executive Director, Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups
Mr. Wang Xiao, Secretary of Secretariat of All-China Youth Federation

Before I give the floor to the Mr Sakaguchi and to the vice Minister of Education, I would
like to say a few words to introduce our discussions here today and here I would emphasise
youth as an asset.

In the next ten years 200 million young people will enter into the Chinese working age
population. They are the best-educated and trained new generation ever in the history of
China. These millions of young people represent not a problem, but rather a huge potential for
economic and social development in China. However, the transition from school to work is
difficult for many young people all over the world. China is no exception. The unemployment
rate is 4 per cent for adults, and we know from experience that it is two-three times higher for
young people.

To be successful national employment strategies have to focus strongly on youth employment,
on the transition from school to work and the further development of skills and mobility of
young people. At the same time, national action plans for young people have to be based on

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1 Member of Kofi Annan’s High-Level Advisory Panel on Youth Employment, Advisor the ILO, former
Director-General of the EU Commission, former Minister of Finance of Sweden, former Director General of
Sweden’s National Labour Market Board.
comprehensive employment strategies. The one will not work without the other: the two elements must be made mutually supportive. There is a great potential for improving the employment situation through the integration of public policies for young women and men in overall employment policies.

In the next ten years China will not only benefit from the inflow of 200 million young people into the working age population, young people with new skills and new energy. China will also go through a period of rapid change, due to the acceleration of the economic reform process and the opening of China to global competition. The promotion of change is a prerequisite for further economic growth and prosperity.

However, the more the government is promoting change through trade, technology and entrepreneurship, the more the government has to manage change in a socially acceptable way. There must be a balanced policy mix. The transition from school to work and the integration of young people into working life is the most important test of how successful the government is in the management of change.

Youth employment is now a top priority of the UN, the ILO and the World Bank. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr Kofi Annan, took on the challenge at the Millennium Summit in 2000, of preparing recommendations on youth employment to be conveyed to world leaders. With the assistance of the UN, the ILO and the World Bank and a high-level panel, such recommendations were prepared and put forward to the General Assembly of the UN. The Recommendations include four priorities:

- Employability: invest in education and vocational training for young people and improve the impact of those investments;
- Equal opportunities: give young women the same opportunities as young men;
- Entrepreneurship: make it easier to start and run enterprises to provide more and better jobs for young women and men; and
- Employment creation: place employment at the centre of macroeconomic policy.

These recommendations provide the international community with an important impetus to mobilise political commitment and practical action to rapidly increase employment opportunities for youth. At the end of 2002 the UN General Assembly took on board the recommendations of the high-level panel by adopting a Resolution on Promoting Youth Employment. The resolution encourages all UN Member States to prepare national reviews and action plans on youth employment. A number of countries have already come forward to volunteer as lead countries in this process of global policy development.

China can play a leading role in this emerging global alliance for youth employment. The National Re-Employment Conference two years ago and the China Employment Forum have built a strong platform for a long-term strategy for the promotion of decent work. A strong focus on youth in the implementation of this strategy is prerequisite for success. Thanks to these preparations and to the support from the UN, the ILO and the World Bank, China can take a leading role in the implementation of the universal commitment taken at the Millennium Summit to give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work.
With these words of introduction it is my great pleasure to give the floor to his Excellency Mr. Chikara Sakaguchi, Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, to give us his views on these important questions regarding youth employment.