Mr Tsunekawa, Mr. Nishida, Ms. Nagano, Ms Akiba, it is a pleasure to welcome you to Bangkok and to our ILO Regional Office – welcome. I would like to begin today with a vote of very warm thanks. The ILO is keenly aware of the importance of the continued strong support that the Japanese Government has provided through the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare – even in this current climate of severe financial constraints. Last year, the ILO/Japan Multi-bilateral Programme implemented ten projects. The Japan Government’s support made this possible. On behalf of my colleagues – and on behalf of the thousands of working women and men who are served by these projects – I extend my very sincere appreciation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The ILO Japan Multi-bilateral Programme has done a great deal to help improve the reach of ILO activities in Asia and the Pacific region. In 2001, we implemented a total of ten field projects or programmes. I will not address all of these in detail – however I would like to point out a few highlights.

One of the most important developments was the staging of the ILO/Japan Asian Regional Meeting on Trafficking of Children for Labour and Sexual Exploitation. Participants from government, employers and workers’ organizations from 16 countries and regions met in Manila. The end result was a Memorandum of Common Understanding for Tripartite Action.

Another important activity is the final evaluation of the Indonesia Chapter of the Expansion of Employment Opportunities for Women programme (EEOW). We appreciate your participation in this evaluation exercise. This procedure is expected to be finalized soon. The lessons learned in Indonesia will prove very useful as we move on with implementation of the other Chapters of the EEOW in Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

Two other important activities are underway this week. The ILO/ Japan/ US Asian Regional Seminar on the Application of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights brought together participants from 25 countries and territories in the region. The ILO/Japan Tripartite Regional Meeting on Youth Employment is continuing in the United Nations Conference Centre as I speak. Both are making important contributions to achieving our goal of decent work in Asia and the Pacific.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Our region has significant needs. Two thirds of the world’s poor live in Asia and the Pacific. The informal sector is enormous. That means, of course, that huge numbers of workers lack adequate social security, and occupational safety and health. There are also many countries in the region that have particular needs. Important challenges include, working with countries in transition – and in particular, China, where transition is taking place on a large scale. Other issues include reconstruction – in particular, there are great needs in East Timor and Afghanistan. It is significant that the ILO/Japan Programme is successfully conducting a project for employment creation and income generation in China. In 2002, ILO Japan also plans to launch a project promoting occupational safety and health measures in small and medium enterprises, and in agriculture in the region.

In keeping with the conclusions reached at the Asian Regional Meeting in August last year, the ILO is working to reduce the huge Decent Work Deficit in the region – integrating and consolidating projects within the framework of ILO goals and strategies and the overall focus of Decent Work. I hope that the integration and use of resources – both the contribution from Japan and the ILO’s own resources – will help us to continue to play a key role in the region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting’s main purpose is to review the activities of 2001 and discuss activities planned for 2002 and 2003. I would like to underline the seriousness with which the ILO approaches this review. We are keenly aware of our responsibility to monitor and assess our performance, to learn lessons, and to put those lessons to good use. We want to ensure that we make every effort to make the ILO/Japan project more efficient and more effective, based on good teamwork between the ILO and the Japanese Government. The contribution from Japan might, for example, be invested in a project focusing on the most urgent and most serious issues in the region. Further, I should also like to propose discussion of a feasible project funded by Japan to assist with the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again, I thank you for your presence here today. And I hope that this meeting represents yet another step towards further close cooperation between ILO and Japan in future.

Thank you