

## WWF Bhutan Statement at the 13<sup>th</sup> Round Table Meeting

Convention Centre, Thimphu

---

*Your Excellencies, Distinguished Chairs,  
ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the outset, I would like to join the distinguished delegates of this august gathering to offer our sincere commendations to the Royal Government, *in particular*, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the GNH Commission for this *important and Proactive* undertaking, to lay out the vision and framework for the 12th Five year Plan, - *the last mile in Bhutan's journey towards becoming a Middle Income country*. Thank you for the invitation and inspiration.

On behalf of WWF Global network, I am humbled to convey the warmest greetings of our colleagues and over 5 million supporters, well-wishers and volunteers, who are committed to a lifelong passion of protecting this *amazingly* Beautiful Planet of ours.

As we all know very well, humanity is at the cusp of making some important choices and decisions. Choices we make will decide how we share this beautiful planet with the rest of the species, *and the world we will leave behind*, for our children. Decisions we take will determine the survival of our own species on this planet.

World's first 'Climate Model' paper, published in 1967 turned exactly 50 yesterday. The groundbreaking research and climate model predicted Global Warming, almost perfectly. Good scientific paper but not very good news for the world. The perils of Climate Change is no longer a prediction, it's a Stark Reality. It is the single largest threat to the survival of humanity on this Planet.

The journey of WWF in Bhutan began in 1977 inspired by Bhutan's farsighted vision to protect and manage more than 50% of its sacred and most diverse land of the Eastern Himalayan Eco-region. WWF, considers this partnership with the Royal government, an immense privilege in traversing this journey of *sustainability* for the well-being of the present and future generations of Bhutan and its environment. This unique foresight, not just for Bhutan, but for the *rest of the planet*, emanates from the selfless leadership of Bhutan's Visionary Monarchs and genuine commitment of the Bhutanese people towards their environment.

Wangchuck centennial Park, the largest National park of Bhutan, co- managed with WWF for the first five years, protects one of the last pristine and intact water reservoirs of Asia – supplying freshwater to millions downstream and driving the largely hydro based economic growth in Bhutan.

WWF's investment over the last 40 years is mirrored in the unique evolution of Bhutan's Protected Area system that provides massive environmental services, valued at almost 15 billion dollars per annum *as per one cursory study*. These pristine **Natural Capital** of Bhutan

cannot be recreated with any scale of modern technology or investments, and its intrinsic value is appreciating *as we speak*, with the rapid degradation of other pristine ecosystems around the world.

Conservation is inherently linked with sustainable development – A vision that Bhutan foresaw right from the crowning of the First King of Bhutan in 1907. The returns on the visionary Investment of Bhutan’s visionary Kings are being reaped by the present generation, and millions who live across the border. The moral conscience of humanity can still take some comfort, knowing Bhutan is still harboring some of the most threatened and critically endangered animals that have been wiped out from other parts of the world.

***Distinguished Mr Co- Chair,***

In our profession, we are also beginning to realize that our Work around the world is not just saving the Tiger and the Coral reefs, but increasingly, it is also about saving humanity. According to a new WHO report, more than one in four deaths in children below the age of five are linked to polluted environments. Every year **1.7 million children die** because of various environmental pollution and Risks. Studies have also shown that the largest impact of degraded and polluted environments are mostly felt by the most vulnerable and the poor. And human-wildlife conflict continues to plague poor farmers across Bhutan.

Increasingly, we are also realizing that Conservation must combine *Idealism and Realism*, and to that effect, addressing sustainable livelihood issues becomes a priority while implementing conservation programs in the Protected areas. Together, we must strive to change the popular notion of **Human Wildlife Conflict to Human Wildlife Co-existence**. In this day and age, the traditional conflicts between nature and commerce can be resolved through Innovative designs, technology and strategic investments. Modernity and global collaboration offers new ways to rediscover our connection to ecosystems, in ways that can improve livelihoods and build economies with minimum ecological footprint. Bhutan’s natural resource sector is well positioned to capitalize upon this new wave of innovation and Green enterprise, that is increasingly gaining prominence around the world.

This Round Table Meeting is taking place at a critical moment in Bhutan’s development journey. While Bhutan’s commitment to conserving the nation’s natural wealth for future generations is extraordinary, bigger environmental challenges are ahead of us. Fortunately, Bhutan is well placed in terms of having all the fundamentals of a progressive and inclusive nation state. The strong participation of the private sector and the civil society in this RTM is a clear testimony of the importance the royal Government attaches to their role under the new realities of a democratic state.

WWF Bhutan is committed to working closely with the Royal Government to implement the core programs of the government’s 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan to ensure a *“Just, Harmonious and a Sustainable Society”*. Under the auspices of the SDGs and WWF’s global conservation goals, we wish to work closely with the royal government. We remain committed in

offering our network capital and expertise in Bhutan’s ambitious policy to remain Carbon Neutral and embrace the SDGs within its unique development vision of Gross National Happiness.

The “Awesome” park in the words of His Excellency the Prime Minister from his TED talk, are at the heart of Bhutan’s **Carbon Neutral Strategy**. However, with changing priorities in a democracy, conserving and managing Bhutan’s 52% Protected Area network system can be hugely expensive. Therefore “**Bhutan for Life**” with a goal to raise 40 million US dollars, an initiative of the Royal government, is designed to access a wide range of financing sources in partnership with various development partners and corporate donors from all over the world.

This model of project finance for permanence (PFP) is derived from the ingenuity and financial rigor of private investors in financing large scale projects. A signature component of the PFP approach is a single closing that delivers pledged funds when conditions for Permanence are met, which serves to motivate the parties and guarantees the ‘Returns of their conservation investments’ over the long term. The financing initiative is particularly effective in leveraging non traditional sources of funds based on Bhutan’s track record of *political stability, greater transparency and accountability, and sound social, economic and environmental policies*. In taking these programs forward, we would be explicitly contributing to 5 of the 16 national key result areas (NKRA) and complimenting the remaining NKRA’s of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan. In closing, on behalf of the entire WWF Global network, I would once again like to convey our immense gratitude to all our partners in the government, for their inspiration and unwavering support and friendship, and at the same time, giving us the unique privilege to secure lasting conservation in one of the *Extraordinary places on this planet*.

**Thank You and Tashi Delek.**