

Statement by Austria

Mr. Matthias RADOSZTICS, Minister Plenipotentiary, Deputy Head of Mission, Statement on the Occasion of 14th Round Table Meeting, Thimphu, Bhutan 12th to 14th March 2019

Your Excellency Dr. Tandi Dorji, Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Dear Secretary, and UN Resident Representative,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me on behalf of the Government and people of Austria and on my own behalf thank the Royal Government of Bhutan and the United Nations on convening this 14th Round Table Meeting. The meeting is an important forum to take stock of the achievements and challenges of Bhutan in pursuing its development goals under the 12th Five Year Plan and a good opportunity for discussion and coordination between the Royal Government of Bhutan and the International Donor Community on the way forward to Bhutan's graduation from the Least Developed Countries (LDC) category by 2023.

Only two weeks ago, H. E. Dr. Karin Kneissl, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Austria visited Bhutan reinforcing and further strengthening the existing close relationship Bhutan and Austria have been enjoying for the last 30 years and will continue to do so. This high level visit concluded with the joint adoption of the Bhutan Country Strategy 2019-2023. It aligns with Bhutan's 12th Five Year Plan and emphasizes our joint commitment to the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

Austria sincerely recognizes the democratic and sustainable socio-economic progress made by Bhutan which is now poised to graduate from a Least Developed Country Status. Bhutan enjoys peace and stability and a robust economic growth. We highly appreciate the successful conduct of the third Parliamentary elections and an increase in the number of women Parliamentarians. However, there are also the last mile challenges that continue to confront Bhutan, not least the challenges notably of: low female participation in political and decision-making positions, high youth

unemployment in general and high female youth unemployment, in particular; violence against women and children and the risks posed by climate change.

Austria believes that establishing, respecting and **enhancing the rule of law** is the core element to continue progress and to ensure “nobody is left behind”. Furthermore, **improvement of accountability** should lead to even more tangible results oriented public service delivery.

During 2019- 2023, Austria’s cooperation with Bhutan will continue from the successful past to focus on the **two thematic areas of Governance and Sustainable Energy**. The interventions in the field of Governance shall promote the mentioned principles of Rule of Law and Accountability while the sector intervention in Sustainable Energy shall promote energy security through diversification, efficiency and efficient management systems.

In our partnership we have **incorporated a human rights based approach connected to the GNH concept in all our programs and projects in Bhutan** especially through the Legal Sector Program where access to an independent, competent and fair justice system should be enhanced and law education-in cooperation with Bhutan’s first law school- strengthened.

Building on Austria’s long track record in supporting sustainable energy in Bhutan, Austria continues contributing to the diversification of sustainable energy sources, increasing the energy efficiency of the infrastructure, and therefore contributes to climate action in Bhutan. In the regional context, the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Capability for the Hindu Kush Himalaya, REEECH, an initiative of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) has been launched with funding from the Austrian Development Cooperation. This facility can also play an important part, and I encourage all countries in the region to make extensive use of this new initiative.

Besides Austria’s engagement in the field of Governance and Sustainable Energy another important pillar to support Bhutan in becoming a strong economy and achieving self-reliance are **business partnerships**. Austria and Bhutan have tremendous potential of developing even closer business relations in the future! A business delegation from Austria visited Bhutan from 1-6 December 2018 to explore potential areas of cooperation. Austria is a leader in

hydroelectric power, organic farming and in the health sector and Bhutan's second largest partner in the hydropower sector! There are a lot of business opportunities to explore. Bhutan is eligible for Austrian soft loans and ADC business partnership financing mechanisms.

Further, the Austrian Development Agency has been accredited to the Green Climate Fund and we are exploring the possibility of collaborating with GNHC on potential projects related to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Finally, let me renew my gratitude to the organizers who successfully organized this Round Table Meeting. We look forward to our further work with the concerned agencies of the Royal Government of Bhutan and development partners in deepening our understanding of Bhutan's specific development needs and challenges on Rule of Law and Sustainable Energy in order to provide tailor-made support! Together we can accomplish more than each of us can do individually and contribute to Bhutan's graduation.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!