

Honorable Co-chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies, and Gentlemen,

It is my honor to convey to this august gathering greetings from Her Majesty Gyalum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck and the Board of Directors of the Bhutan Foundation.

As many here may not be aware, kindly allow me to briefly elucidate the history of the Foundation. In the late 1940s, Her Majesty the Royal Grandmother, Ashi Kesang Choedon Wangchuck, attended school in London with Henrietta Fanner of England (who later became Henrietta Goelet) and Lisina Von Schulthess of Switzerland (who later became Lisina Hoch). A life-long friendship then began between our Royal Family and the Goelet and Hoch families that now spans over four generations. This friendship led to the establishment of the Bhutan Foundation on March 25, 1986, as the only American nonprofit focused solely on Bhutan.

Over the next decade and a half, the Foundation concentrated mostly on projects that developed Bhutan's agriculture and supported Bhutanese students to study abroad. However, in 2002, Her Majesty Gyalum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck commanded that the Bhutan Foundation could do much more to develop the relationship between Bhutan and the United States to build capacity and fill critical gaps created by rapid development. Therefore, in 2007, a new Board of Directors was instituted and our offices established in Washington, DC and Thimphu, to function as a bridge between the United States and Bhutan, and to tap into the growing interest in the Kingdom.

Bhutan's environmental stewardship has won the country accolades from the global community. Today, the Global Tiger Center under the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests joins the ranks of a few (maybe three) fully national teams of professionals that exist globally and have the expertise to capture and collar wild tigers repeatedly and successfully. Bhutan's medical doctors and health-care professionals, who are at the forefront of the country's noble duty of providing universal quality health-care to every Bhutanese, benefit from international certification trainings imparted through the Hoch Center for Emergency Education and Training at the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences. As the Ministry of Education gears up to roll out inclusive education

across the country, we look back with aplomb and satisfaction at our almost decade-long partnership to build a cadre of Bhutanese educators trained in teaching children with special needs. Along the banks of the great rivers of lower Kheng, the River Guides of Panbang, an ecotourism enterprise fully owned and operated by members of the community, have now become change agents within this community, carrying forward the country's aspiration to curb out-migration from villages, create gainful employment, and promote sustainable eco-tourism. We are deeply honored to have played a small role in enabling all of these to happen. And in doing so, we have stayed true to the mission of the Bhutan Foundation *to enable the people of Bhutan to reach their full potential by **developing local capacity and facilitating global support***. As we strive to improve the quality of Bhutan's human capital, we foster professional relationships between Bhutanese institutions and agencies, and those abroad. We also accord great importance to and take pride in performing our role as a bridge between Bhutan and many friends of Bhutan in the United States.

May I take this opportunity to commend the Royal Government of Bhutan, the vibrant civil society, the private sector, and all the development partners in the collective efforts to successfully usher Bhutan into the middle-income country category. As Bhutan embarks on the last leg of this graduation, it is an honor for the Bhutan Foundation to further commit our support towards the country's aim of creating a *Just, Harmonious, and Sustainable Society*. Our program areas, originally defined within the four pillars of Gross National Happiness, align with 12 of the 17 National Key Result Areas of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and include elements from several of the Flagship Programs. It is, therefore, imperative that we explore synergies that best support the country's goals and aspirations through our place-based interventions in our program communities.

In closing, I would like to thank all our government and civil society partners in giving us an opportunity to contribute towards creating a knowledge- and skill-based human capital in Bhutan. The Bhutan Foundation remains committed in offering our steadfast support to the next five years of Bhutan's extraordinary journey of progress. For it is the vision of the Foundation **to see Bhutan as a progressive society enriched by GNH values.** Thank you and Tashi Delek.