

Statement of Ireland

14th Round Table Meeting, Bhutan, March 12-15, 2019

Mr. Prime Minister, Honorable Chair

Mr. Steiner,

Ireland wishes to thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for the invitation to attend the 14th Round Table Meeting. We are honoured to be here.

We congratulate you on this meeting and we are conscious of its very substantive agenda. We are also very supportive of the serious aspirations that you have set out for the Kingdom of Bhutan in your 12th Five-Year Plan which runs until 2023. In particular, Bhutan's continued emphasis on the happiness and wellbeing of its people is an approach we greatly admire and respect.

We warmly welcome the international and multilateral context in which you are setting your ambitions. Simply looking around this conference hall is evidence of this. Ireland is strongly committed to the multilateral system. We see it as strengthening our well-being, our prosperity, our security and our sovereignty.

Indeed, Ireland as a small country, located on the periphery of Europe, has first-hand experience of this through our membership of the European Union. We are proud that the European Union is an important and valued partner of Bhutan.

Ireland is very happy to be part of EU-Bhutan Cooperation in the areas of Human Development and Migration; Sustainable Growth and Development; and Clean Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

'A Better World', Ireland's new policy for International Development was recently launched by Ireland's government. The new policy focuses Ireland's international development on the Sustainable Development Goals and assisting the 'the furthest behind first'.

'A Better World' commits Ireland to support countries' transitions towards middle income status. It is clear that issues around economic and climate vulnerability continue to cause concern in countries which have recently or are due to 'transition' from least developed country status. Ireland recognises that the pace of transition varies, and the process can be challenging. We are fully committed to supporting Bhutan and other countries, including through our engagement on LDC graduation at the UN.

Ireland is also working with the OECD and a number of graduating Least Developed Countries on this issue. We would be very happy to share further information on this work with Bhutan.

We are very struck by the unrivalled and principled action Bhutan has taken to tackle the impacts of climate change. We are also struck by your special vulnerabilities to these same impacts.

Climate action is a key priority in the Irish Government's new policy for international development. In this context Ireland would like to warmly congratulate the Kingdom of Bhutan on your new role as chair of the Least Developed Countries Group of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Ireland continues to financially support this group. This support is part of our objective to ensure that the voices of those countries most vulnerable to climate change and most affected by its impacts are heard.

Bhutan has, in particular, shown strong leadership in the fight against climate change as one of the few countries that has achieved a net zero carbon footprint and is in a position to influence real change. We can all learn lessons from you. Ireland greatly looks forward to working closely with Mr Sonam Phuntsho Wangdi and his colleagues in representing the LDCs that are especially vulnerable to climate change – especially as we are mindful that you have done the least to cause the grave problem of climate change.

We congratulate the Royal Government of Bhutan on developing its ambitious 12th Five-Year Plan which will act as your strategy for graduation. We hear your message that Bhutan will need the continued support of your development partners to ensure that you consolidate your impressive development gains. In the words of Ireland's Prime Minister, "the next decade may well define the world we live in for the rest of the century".

Therefore, Bhutan's concerns that the pace of your graduation from LDC status must absorb the withdrawal of international support is logical. Your call for a smooth transition is fair. The call to address your remaining last mile challenges is right. We are very conscious that the UN Secretary-General's 2018 report on progress towards the SDGs highlights that LDCs remain far below many of the SDG targets. In this respect, it is true that the performance of the LDCs will have a great influence on the success of Agenda 2030.

The road to 2030 is complex. Our world is volatile. On our own, no individual country or organisation in this hall can make a sufficient impact. Ireland knows this from our own national story, our history and our experience of development, modernisation and globalisation. We have known poverty and hunger, but we have also seen our country transformed over the past 50 years, through our own efforts and, very importantly, with the assistance of others.

The principles and the partnerships that underlie my country's progress and that of many of our European neighbours is something that we wish to see replicated elsewhere. In this respect, we welcome being invited to attend this Round Table Meeting and, as a UN Member State and a member of the European Union, we will seek to support the Royal Government of Bhutan as it embarks on implementing the 12th Five-Year Plan.

Thank you.