



**14th Round Table Meeting, Thimphu,
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Read by Mr. Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator

“Today, GNH has come to mean so many things to so many people but to me it signifies simply - Development with Values. Thus, for my nation today GNH is the bridge between the fundamental values of kindness, equality and humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth. GNH acts as our National Conscience guiding us towards making wise decision for a better future.”- His Majesty the King.

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the United Nations in Bhutan, I am honored to be addressing the Royal Government of Bhutan and its development partners at this 14th Round Table Meeting. 2019 is an important year as it is the first year of implementation of the RGoB’s 12th Five Year Plan and, the first year of implementation of the UN’s Five-year strategic partnership framework for Bhutan—the United Nations Sustainable Development Partnership Framework (UNSDPF).

Let me take the opportunity to inform you that, in the spirit of UN Delivering as One, this Joint Statement is being delivered on behalf of the 25 UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes that support Bhutan. These entities are:

Eight Resident Agencies:

(FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC, UNFPA, UN Women, WFP and WHO)

16 Non-resident Agencies

(IFAD, ITC, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNEP, UNESCAP, UNESCO, UNHABITAT, WiPO, UNIDO, UNOCHA, UNOPS, UN Technology Bank, UNV and ITU)

In preparation for Bhutan's LDC graduation by 2023, the UN Country Team is adapting to the needs of the country. Three additional UN entities will be working here in Bhutan for the coming 5 years: UNDESA; the UN Technology Bank (under the OHRLLS) and; the International Trade Centre (ITC). These entities, and the rest of the UN Country Team will support Bhutan during this critical period before graduation such that we're not only looking at the graduation as the only key milestone, but looking beyond 2023, to ensure a sustainable graduation thereby, avoiding reversal of development gains already achieved.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

When all 193 United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we made a pledge to ensure "no one will be left behind" and to reach the "furthest behind first." In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind.

Bhutan is on-track in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Bhutan's development policy of Gross National Happiness is well aligned with the objectives of the Agenda 2030.

The role of civil society in working with the Royal Government to advance a rights-based approach and improve participation and accountability is increasingly recognized. CSOs have an important role to play to help vulnerable groups have their voices heard and acted upon.

In this pursuit to reach the furthest behind, the UN partners with the CSOs in Bhutan in enhancing their role and effectiveness as a civil society, which will be increasingly important as a bridge between vulnerable groups and the government.

For this reason, we at the UN believe capacity development of CSOs is very important for the country and a most critical action for the UN as we assist on the last mile to LDC graduation.

Their Majesties' vision of a compassionate and just society has been enabled because of the work that the CSOs have done for the country.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

One of the UN's priority is increasing women's representation in decision-making and promote women's participation in politics and governance, as well as in business, society and the economy at large. If women make up 50% of Bhutan's population but only 15% of the National Assembly and National Council members, there is still a distance we must travel to achieve a more gender-inclusive governance system. The conferment of the *Gyen-tag* by His Majesty to Bhutanese women in senior position is a recognition of the important roles played by women and a recognition of gender equality in this society.

The first comprehensive National Survey Report on Violence Against Women and Girls launched last week on the International Women's Day confirm the need for raising further awareness on violence against all vulnerable groups -children, women and girls, Domestic Violence Prevention Act (DVPA) and the support services available in the country.

I am mindful of what UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres said last Friday on international Women's day:

“Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change,” addresses infrastructure, systems and frameworks that have been constructed largely in line with a male-defined culture. We need to find innovative ways of reimagining and rebuilding our world so that it works for everyone.”

HEALTH

Much progress has been made in the areas of child health and education. Further investment is necessary to reduce neonatal, infant and child mortality, stunting and anemia. Today, many more children are celebrating their fifth birthday than a decade ago, and many more mothers are surviving pregnancy and delivery-related complications to celebrate it with them. With sustained health efforts undertaken in the past two decades, today, there are many more doctors and nurses and health workers in the country who are equipped with knowledge and skills to provide quality services. And as we saw last week in the National press the government is committed to doing even more – especially in terms of raising quality.

EDUCATION

Contributions made to the national and global goals in education through Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD), basic inclusive education focusing on the most marginalized, and education of children in monastic institutions has come a long way. However, only 20% of children aged 3-5 years have access to early learning. The need is more in rural and remote communities.

More than a third of children in Bhutan show signs of stunted growth caused by chronic malnutrition. The UN’s work in Bhutan aims to combat child malnutrition and, by encouraging school enrolment

and attendance, to support the country's development plan to reduce poverty.

The UN supports the development of human capital through expansion of quality Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) and the national education assessment framework. About 2 million USD was mobilized for the Royal Government through Global Partnership for Education (GPE) (2018-2020).

Increased focus on upstream policy work also includes the development of an equivalency framework for non-formal education, a ten-year inclusive education roadmap, and a multi-sectoral national ECCD strategic plan.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate scientists have warned there are only 12 years for global warming to be kept to a maximum of 1.5 degrees, beyond which, even half a degree increase will significantly worsen the risks of drought, flooding, extreme heat and poverty for hundreds of millions of people.

Bhutan has already started to face the ill-impacts of climate change through erratic weather patterns, fast receding glaciers and the risks of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods.

The Paris agreement pledge is to keep temperatures between 1.5 to 2 degrees. At 1.5 degrees, the proportion of the global population exposed to water stress could be 50% lower than at 2 degrees. The impacts of climate change include increasing water scarcity and flood risk, along with declines in water quality which will impact both human and natural ecosystem.

If world temperatures increase to 2 degrees, 99% of corals will be lost.

We must all take responsibility and act for we are the generation to feel the sharpest impacts of Climate Change. And we are the ones who can act to secure the future for those to come. It is the greatest challenge of our time and the biggest threat to our future. Our future generations will look back on us all and ask us what we did. It is worth recalling that Climate Action is one of the top 5 priorities of UN Secretary General Guterres for 2019.

I wish to take the opportunity to commend the work of the Secretary of National Environment Commission, Dasho Sonam P. Wangdi who was recently appointed as Chair of the 47 Least Developed Countries Group at UN on climate change negotiations. As Chair, Dasho Sonam represents the negotiating group of the 47 Least Developed Countries which, despite contributing the least to climate change, suffer the most from its impacts. I wish to commend the leadership role that Bhutan is taking on Climate Action.

Sem-dha No-sam Thing-go. From a Buddhist point of view, we know that wisdom and compassion are two wings of a bird. When it comes to Climate Change, as much as possible, we must look at it like combining mind and heart thinking with action. We need to convert our compassion for the planet into practical financing for relevant Climate Action here in Bhutan and this includes UN support in the area of innovative financing.

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT AND PREPAREDNESS

Asia is the most disaster-prone region in the world and disasters are increasing in both frequency and severity. As part of our efforts to prepare for and reduce the risk and impact of disasters in Bhutan, the Government, UN and development partners have developed a

coordination platform – a Road Map – for disaster risk management across 6 priority areas: disaster awareness, data preparedness, governance and coordination, resourcing and sector preparedness. This “Roadmap for Disaster Risk Management in Bhutan” will serve as an instrument to guide our future activities to move towards a safer and more resilient Bhutan.

CULTURE

Bhutan will soon nominate its first Biosphere Reserve which will symbolize its commitment to the Agenda 2030 at the local level, with integration of nature conservation, sustainable development, culture and education. The Cultural Heritage Bill which is yet to be endorsed by the Parliament of Bhutan will play a crucial role in the conservation of Bhutan’s unique cultural heritage and would also be a milestone and will potentially pave the way for the inscription of a first Bhutanese site on the World Heritage list.

TRADE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bhutan's exports are highly concentrated, with about 80% consisting of 10 commodities, and 80% destined to one market (India). This high degree of trade concentration leaves the country vulnerable and dependent. Exports should be diversified, both in terms of markets and value-added products or services, to generate revenue and livelihood for small producers, women and youth. Economic and trade diversification is among the top priorities of the government and will be part of UN support to Bhutan in the coming years.

CYBERSECURITY

In this digital age, modern societies are globally interconnected and increasingly dependent on ICTs and digital infrastructure. However, the interconnectivity also creates interdependencies, and vulnerabilities to emerging threats that need to be managed at the national, regional and international levels. Enhancing cybersecurity and protecting critical information infrastructures is essential to every nation's security and economic well-being- particularly in the global move towards the digital economy and information society. The UN has supported the RGoB in establishing a Computer Emergency Response Team in Bhutan, a National Cyber Strategy and a Child Online Protection to ensure children and youth stay safe online.

INNOVATIVE FINANCING

The UN is supporting the government in identifying the best practices in innovative financing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and national development plans of Bhutan.

Innovative finance comprises of initiatives to raise new funding or to optimize the use of traditional funding for development. Innovative finance is not about replacing or realigning international assistance, but to identify solutions that mobilize new financing for development, more sustainably and more predictability.

It is also about generating a new relationship on development with the private sector and non-state actors. Innovative finance is at the heart of LDC graduation and to take a recent quote of the Prime Minister, to 'convert donors to trading partners.' I trust we will do this transition deliberately and strengthen the country's inherent strengths when it comes to self- reliance.

INVESTMENT CASE FOR DEVELOPMENT WORK

The Royal Government of Bhutan is committed to economic reforms and removing constraints to growth within the concept of Gross National Happiness and its four constituent pillars: Good Governance; Sustainable Socio-economic Development; Preservation and Promotion of Culture; and Environmental Conservation.

The SDGs represent tremendous investment opportunities. However, a major challenge in financing the Agenda 2030 remains in the importance of fostering an enabling environment of financing and investment, assisting the private sector to mobilize long-term investment, and thus champion innovation solutions to financing the SDGs.

The agriculture sector plays a critical role in contributing to the country's development and private sector investment, especially considering the wider-base implementation of agriculture programs and its part in balanced-economic growth.

With Bhutan's graduation by 2023, the government, development partners and all stakeholders recognize that farming will continue to play a key role in socio-economic development into the next decade, along with its crucial contribution to food security, nutrition, poverty reduction and social safety-net.

In Bhutan, we the UN, need to continue, to innovate. One way to do this is to highlight some of the investment cases for development work that we undertaken:

A case-study for investment for ***Early Childhood Care and Development*** (ECCD) was carried out in Bhutan to address inequalities in health, ability, achievement, opportunity and long-term success.

Electric Vehicles is one of the new technologies that has garnered attention in developed countries and is increasing in developing countries as one of the key green low-carbon urban mobility options. Electric Vehicle initiatives will play a catalytic role in creating an enabling environment for people to switch to electric mobility, reduce our oil imports and strengthen our private sector..

Food fortification is a cost-effective way to address micronutrient deficiencies. In 2017, Bhutan joined the global fight against micronutrient deficiencies through the introduction of fortified rice in school meals. Today 75,000 school children eat fortified vegetable oil and fortified rice enriched with vitamins and minerals every day. Over the coming years the Government will set-up a regulatory framework for fortified food and work on bringing fortified foods to the commercial market to the benefit all Bhutanese people.

Gender-based Violence: Girls and women are the drivers of sustainable development and powerful agents of change. Violence against women has many costs, especially physical and emotional...increasingly countries are documenting the financing costs and in doing so we add even further reasons as to why we need to stay fully committed to Gender Equality in all the work both in Bhutan and around the world.

PARTNERSHIPS

While innovation is good, innovation with partnering is better. The sharing of information, the increasing availability of big data, the range of expertise, technologies, and financial resources can drive entrepreneurship, connect a geographically diverse range of stakeholder, civil society organizations, academia, the private

sector and communities to find the best solution for any given challenge.

Expanding alliances with media and other non-traditional partners is crucial to strengthening the work of the UN regarding social mobilization, advocacy and engendering citizen engagement with the SDGs. We the UN will continue to strengthen our partnership with the media here in Bhutan for we know they are crucial to deepening our understanding and commitment to the society.

Our partnership with Bhutan is about to reach the 50-year milestone and over the next 5 years, the UN in Bhutan will bring in grants to the value of USD 120 million, a 40 percent increase, over the last 5 years. This work will be especially targeted to 4 main areas of work:

- a) strengthening data, so as to produce, disseminate and use statistics in accordance with internationally agreed standards.
- b) strengthening social services (especially education and health),
- c) strengthening governance (including support to parliament) and
- d) achieving results in the area of climate action and disaster preparedness. Whether you are a parliamentarian, government counterpart, CSO counterpart, member of the academic community, member of the media, or a development partner, we stand ready to work alongside you to support the development of the country which is grounded within the paradigm of Gross National Happiness.

HUMAN RIGHTS

I wish to take the opportunity to thank the RGOB and its commitment to protecting and supporting its most vulnerable

people. We saw this most recently in January where the mission of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention was warmly received and supported and also in the preparations leading up to the Universal Periodic Review this coming May in Geneva. This is a country that takes seriously its international obligations.

UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

I am mindful that Bhutan joined the fraternity of troop and police contributing countries in 2014 and I am mindful of the Bhutanese troops and police and civilians that are serving and maintaining international peace and security around the World today. This is a testament to Bhutan's commitment to share the burden along with other Member States. I wish to take this opportunity to thank His Majesty, the RGoB and the People of Bhutan for your commitment to international peace and security.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, on behalf of the UN in Bhutan, I am reminded this is a UN Delivering As One — where we are tasked to provide strategic, relevant, effective and coherent results. On behalf of the 25 agencies working here in Bhutan, this is our commitment to the Government and people of Bhutan.

LDC graduation is an opportunity to enhance the work the UN does in Bhutan. We know we have to adapt and thus provide the support that further deepens Bhutan's self-reliance and further strengthens Bhutan's standing within the international community.

This year, we also embark on a new journey of UN Reform. To accomplish the 2030 Agenda, a bold change has been made to the UN Development System so as to further empower a new generation of country teams to accomplish the goals enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals. This reform is inspired by the

support and commitment we receive from the 193-member states: we the UN take our responsibility seriously to consistently deliver better results in the most efficient manner possible.

Sem-dha No-sam Thing-go. Wisdom and compassion are two wings of a bird. Across all the issues outlined above we will strive to combine mind and heart thinking with action. We know we have done a good job when our various partners across parliament, RGOB, academic community, CSOs, private sector and media provide us with the feedback that our work is strengthening Bhutan's own self-reliance and we are supporting the most vulnerable in society.

I would like to end with a quote from the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres.

"Let's keep showing all people that we care. Let's keep proving our worth through action. And let's accelerate our efforts to move our world forward and leave no one behind."

Kadrinche and Tashi Delek