



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

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STATEMENT

BY

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GENERAL DEBATE
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Madam President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Distinguished Delegates,

I have the honor to convey the greetings of His Majesty the King of Bhutan to this august gathering and His best wishes for the success of this 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I also wish to congratulate Her Excellency Maria Fernanda Espinosa Garces, on being elected as the President of the current Session of the General Assembly and assure Your Excellency of Bhutan's full support.

The Kingdom of Bhutan, commends His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajcak for the successful completion of the 72nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly.

I seek your indulgence, please allow me to share Bhutan's observations on some of the key issues before us today:

1. UN REFORMS

Excellencies,

Bhutan welcomes and supports the Secretary General Antonio Guterres's ambitious and timely agenda to reform the United Nations Development System, which is in sync with Agenda 2030 to make the UN more relevant and "fit for purpose".

We also welcome the draft implementation plan by the UN Deputy Secretary General for the inception of the new Resident Coordinator System. We have taken note of the appeal to Member States for the front-loaded voluntary contribution to the special trust fund to cover the immediate gap of the cost of a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator system. In this regard, Bhutan will be making a token voluntary contribution towards the trust fund.

Following the wider reforms of the UN system, the reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) must also go hand in hand. The reform must accommodate the interest and concerns of all the Member States, particularly of those unrepresented and underrepresented with a view to reflecting the realities of a vastly changed global environment.

The membership of the UN has increased fourfold and the challenges we face today have become far more complex. Therefore, the institution must adapt, evolve and remain relevant in order to address the growing challenges of our times and fulfill our common aspirations for a more equitable, inclusive and sustainable world.

2. 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Excellencies,

The reforms of the UN geared towards implementing Agenda 2030, must provide the essential impetus to galvanize support for progress in areas that have been found to be deficient - to meet the goals and targets within the set time-frame of 2030.

I am happy to share that Bhutan is well on-track to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. With happiness and well-being of our people at the center of our development efforts, Bhutan's development model of Gross National Happiness resonates well with the objectives of Agenda 2030.

The repositioning of sustainable development, which is at the heart of the United Nation's principle of "leaving-no-one-behind", is also in tandem with Bhutan's national development priorities.

Bhutan presented its Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of the SDG targets at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in July this year. The review enabled us to assess the progress in the implementation of the targets and achievements against our development endeavors. I thank the Member States for their keen interest and valuable feedback.

3. LDC GRADUATION

Excellencies,

My country - a tiny landlocked country in the Himalayas - started its planned development only in 1961. Under the visionary leadership of our Monarchs, industrious people and generous assistance from our development partners, Bhutan today is poised to graduate from the Least Developed Countries category. We successfully completed our second triennial review of the Committee for Development Policy in March 2018 and have been recommended for graduation in 2023. On behalf of the Royal Government, I would like to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all our development partners for their friendship, generosity and support.

While we have achieved two of the three thresholds to be eligible to graduate from the LDC category for two successive triennials, we have not been able to achieve the Economic Vulnerability Index threshold. Bhutan continues to face serious challenges in terms of its narrow economic base and vulnerability to natural disasters. The economic and structural impediments to growth - are also reported in the Vulnerability Profile of Bhutan by United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

Bhutan looks forward to undertake its graduation from LDC in a sustainable manner by building productive capacity and economic resilience to ensure, there is no back slippage on the hard-earned development gains. The pace of graduation must be able to absorb the withdrawal of international support measures. Smooth transition is thus critical to ensure that - graduation is sustainable and does not disrupt the ongoing development plans and processes.

The forthcoming 12th Five-Year National Development Plan (2018-2023) is critical as it is Bhutan's last plan as an LDC and will serve as our transition strategy for graduation. Efforts during the period will focus on consolidating past progress and addressing the remaining last mile challenges - to build a strong foundation for a vibrant, resilient and sustainable economy towards achieving SDGs.

The UN Secretary General's report on the Progress towards the SDGs 2018 has underscored that LDCs remain far below many of the SDG targets. Ultimately the success of Agenda 2030 with its promise of "leaving-no-one-behind" hinges on the performance of the LDCs.

4. CLIMATE CHANGE

Excellencies,

Climate change due to global warming, and human activity is not only a serious threat to humanity but also to sustainable development. Action is needed at international, regional, national and local levels to combat this menace. The impacts of climate change affect the poorer countries and poorer people disproportionately, as they are not able to adapt or deal with its impacts. Since, mitigating climate change means reducing emission of greenhouse gases, which is emitted from consumption of energy for all economic and household activities, it affects everyone and is tied to economic and energy security issues.

The ever-increasing environmental pressures from climate change, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, soil degradation, air and water pollution, among others, have far reaching economic and social consequences, which contribute to poverty and to growing social inequalities. The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development rightly provides a unique opportunity to ensure that sustainable development is based on the rule of law – with the focus on environmental rule of law, being central to sustainable development.

Planet earth cannot and must not be the monopoly of Homo sapiens – it is an abode for all sentient beings. The Buddhist tenet associated with conservation and protection of the five elements of this planet will remain as our single hope for survival and refuge for our posterity.

Natural disasters such as the recent hurricanes and typhoons that struck the United States, the Philippines, China and Japan, and the devastating flood in Kerala, India are not isolated incidents. How many more incidents like these do

we need? How many more experts do we need, to convince us that natural disasters are aggravated by climate change?

I believe devastation and destruction from extreme weather conditions alone cost the world around USD 330 billion in 2017. Climate change also threatens to push 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030. Climate change refugees on a large scale will certainly become a reality.

Therefore, we must act now and ensure that international support to tackle climate change - galvanized through the landmark Paris Agreement does not waver at any cost. This is the international community's moral responsibility to the millions of people around the world, especially those in the developing world who are disproportionately affected.

Bhutan has also been affected by extreme weather phenomena with increased frequency of natural disasters such as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), flash floods, windstorms and landslides. All these have had serious impacts on the assets and livelihood of our people and the hard-earned development gains.

Bhutan's leadership in sustainable development and environmental stewardship has been recognized globally. We are fortunate that the past investments in environmental conservation are reaping climate dividends. Our 72.6% forest cover not only serve as a carbon sink for greenhouse gas emissions but also provide valuable ecosystem services of clean water for drinking, agriculture and hydropower generation.

Bhutan remains committed to uphold its 2009 commitment to remain carbon neutral and reaffirms its pledge to fulfilling its commitments to the Paris Agreement for Climate Change.

5. UN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Excellencies,

Although being a small developing country, with a population of little over half a million, Bhutan has always worked constructively with other Member States to realize the noble objectives of the United Nations since its membership in 1971. Among others, Bhutan remains fully committed to the cause of international peace and security, which is one of the key mandates and objectives of the United Nations.

Bhutan joined the fraternity of troops and police contributing countries in 2014 to play a meaningful role towards maintaining international peace and security. It is a testimony of our commitment to share the burden along with other Members States. Since then, Bhutan has been working towards gradually broadening and deepening our engagement in the UN peacekeeping operations.

I am happy to inform that Bhutan became the first country to sign the Rapid Deployment Level Agreement (RDL) with the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations in December 2017. Bhutan has also pledged an integrated Formed Police Unit (FPU). As such, Bhutan stands ready to deploy a contingent, whenever, the United Nations calls upon us to do so.

6. EVENTS IN BHUTAN

Excellencies,

In 2008, Bhutan transitioned from an absolute benevolent monarchy to a democratic constitutional monarchy – a meaningful, deliberate and purposeful progression. The democratic changes in Bhutan evolved through an internal process and not through external pressure or revolution. With the adoption of the Constitution in 2008, our Monarchs have devolved the responsibilities of safeguarding our sovereignty and security to the Bhutanese people.

Since then we have witnessed two elected governments. The term of the second elected government concluded in August 2018 and the third parliamentary elections are underway in Bhutan. The primary round of elections just concluded on 15 September and the general round of elections will be held on 18 October. We expect to have the next government in place by early November 2018.

Over the past decade, our Monarchs and our people have established a strong foundation for a functional, vibrant and intelligent democracy within the tapestry of constitutionalism and the rule of law.

As we look to the future, Bhutan will continue working with Member States to ensure that the United Nations continues to play a key role in promoting peace, security and solidarity. In this regard, I wish to conclude with a quote from our beloved King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck:

“There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world, if our aims are so separate and divergent, if we do not accept that in the end, we are people, all alike, sharing the Earth among ourselves and also with other sentient beings, all of whom have an equal role and stake in the state of this planet and its players”.

I wish the 73rd session of the United Nations General Assembly every success.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!