



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

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STATEMENT

BY

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FOREIGN SECRETARY OF BHUTAN

AT THE

GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
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**Mr. President
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the Presidency of the 64th session of the UN General Assembly. We are confident that under your able leadership and guidance, our deliberations will be successful. Please be assured of my delegation's fullest support and cooperation. I would also like to convey our deep appreciation to your predecessor, H.E. Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, for his leadership of the 63rd session.

Mr. President,

It has only been 18 months since my country successfully transitioned to a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. Within this period, the elected government has made every effort to establish a strong foundation for a sustainable and vibrant democracy, as it is these initial years that will determine the direction of democracy in Bhutan. Concrete steps are being taken to empower the people and to ensure that democracy truly benefits every citizen.

The people of Bhutan, although hesitant at first, but guided and encouraged by our enlightened and visionary monarchs, have fully embraced democracy. From our experience so far, we are confident that a strong foundation for democracy has been established; it is now time to nurture and continue to strengthen this foundation.

Mr. President,

The world is grappling with multiple, interlinked global crises. The impact of these crises has been particularly severe for the least developed countries, where levels of poverty and insecurity are already high.

The food and energy crises have driven millions of the most vulnerable people deeper into poverty and further desperation. Meeting their needs and freeing them from the cycle of poverty continues to be the major challenge to development and to achieving the MDGs. It is inconceivable that in an era of unprecedented prosperity, the vast majority of the world's population remains in poverty and destitution. Poverty alleviation, therefore, must be at the forefront of the international community's development efforts.

Exacerbating these crises is the influenza pandemic that is affecting us all. It has exposed the inadequacies of the health systems of many countries to address the sudden appearance of a new strain of influenza virus. Bhutan, too, has not escaped this pandemic. We must mobilize all our efforts in responding effectively to such global public health emergencies through coordinated action in detecting and containing such pandemic outbreaks.

Since the adoption of the Monterrey Consensus in 2002, developing countries have made significant progress in many areas of domestic resource mobilization. However,

challenges remain, especially during the current economic slowdown, for developing countries to mobilize adequate domestic resources to meet their development needs. For many such countries, ODA continues to remain the most important source of external financing to achieve their developments objectives and the attainment of the MDGs. We, therefore, encourage donor countries to take concrete steps to fulfilling their agreed ODA commitments.

Mr. President,

In Bhutan, we have achieved relative socio-economic progress over the last five years. The annual GDP growth rate has averaged around 8%. The national literacy rate has reached 60% and health coverage sustained at 90%. The Royal Government continues to accord high priority to the social sector.

Bhutan was among the first group of countries to carry out the MDG Needs Assessment and Costing Exercise in 2007. The findings of the report clearly confirm that Bhutan is on track to achieving most of the MDG targets. However, Bhutan still faces major challenges in areas such as gender equality in higher school education and maternal health. Meeting these challenges will require continued and substantial development assistance, especially since the cost of reaching the remaining population that are in the remote areas of Bhutan, is significantly high.

Bhutan launched the 10th Five-Year Plan in July 2008 with the overarching goal of poverty reduction and the implementation of MDG-based initiatives. As this is the first Plan to be implemented under the first elected government, the successful implementation of the Plan is of paramount importance in reaffirming people's faith in parliamentary democracy and ensuring a successful political transition.

These successes in the political, social and economic fields would not have been possible without the support of our development partners, both bilateral and multilateral. To them, I offer our deep gratitude and appreciation and we look forward to their continued assistance and support during this critical transitional phase.

Mr. President,

It is increasingly becoming evident that the impacts of continuing climate change cannot be ignored. While its adverse effects will spare none, small developing countries will bear a heavier burden, even though they contribute least to the causes.

Despite Bhutan's negligible emission of Green House Gases, our fragile mountain ecology faces potential risks - primarily the adverse impact on agriculture, which is the mainstay of our people. The erratic and severe weather patterns and the threats of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods are of particular concern to Bhutan. Out of approximately 3000 glacial lakes in Bhutan, 26 are in imminent danger of bursting. Other hazards like flash floods, landslides, forest fires and droughts are also likely to increase.

When cyclone Aila hit the Bay of Bengal in May this year, it also had disastrous and widespread effects in Bhutan touching every corner of the country. Precious lives were lost. Power and water supplies affected. Roads, bridges and vital infrastructure damaged. Farmers,

who are the most vulnerable sections, were the worse affected. Our capacity to carry out adaptation and mitigation measures is also severely constrained by lack of scientific, technical and financial resources.

Bhutan has always maintained that climate change must be addressed within the framework of sustainable development. The issues are inextricably linked to development, and any debate on the subject must relate to equity and the right of developing countries to be able to provide better livelihoods to their people.

The need of the present times is a strong political commitment to be guided by "good environmental governance." Our efforts must be directed towards replacing unsustainable practices and creating a low carbon economy through the development and use of renewable and energy efficient technologies.

My delegation appreciates the initiative of the Secretary General in convening the High Level Event on Climate Change. It provided the necessary political impetus for negotiations to be concluded in Copenhagen this December. We must now advance the progress of the multilateral negotiations in every possible way to ensure that tangible results are achieved at Copenhagen for the well being of present and future generations.

In this regard, I am happy to inform this august gathering that Bhutan will assume the Chairmanship and host the 16th Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in April 2010. Given the importance of the subject, climate change and environment will be the theme of the Summit and the issue will continue to receive the highest attention of our leaders when they meet in Thimphu.

Mr. President,

Terrorism in all forms and manifestations is a serious threat to domestic as well as global peace and security. It endangers and undermines our common values of respect for human rights, the rule of law and our basic desire to live in peace and harmony. Preventing terrorism is to preserve these fundamental values on which lasting peace and security can be achieved.

Even my country, which has always enjoyed peace and stability, has not been spared of this evil menace. Therefore, Bhutan fully supports the international consensus towards taking firm action against terrorism. The adoption of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy by the General Assembly is an important political achievement that represents our common approach towards combating the scourge of global terrorism. We must show similar commitment in concluding a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Within our region, the leaders of SAARC have concluded an Agreement on "Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters". This agreement reaffirms our region's commitment to collectively address the evils of terrorism.

Mr. President,

Bhutan accords high importance to the reform of the United Nations, particularly the revitalization of the General Assembly and the reform of the Security Council. We fully

support the expansion of the Security Council, both its permanent and non-permanent membership. Given their active role in global affairs, their capacity and resources to shoulder greater responsibilities, and to reflect the present global realities and to make the UN more representative, we fully support India, Japan, Brazil and Germany plus two from Africa to be permanent members in the Security Council.

My delegation is greatly encouraged by the momentum gained in the intergovernmental negotiations on the reform process. We hope that the 64th Session will build upon the progress achieved thus far and under your able leadership bring this long-drawn process to a successful conclusion.

Mr. President,

Natural calamities are regularly occurring every year and smaller developing countries are increasingly faced with challenges to cope with such occurrences. Just last week, my country was severely affected by an earthquake that measured 6.3 on the Richter scale. It is one of the biggest disasters we have experienced in recent times. Its devastating effects were felt in six districts of eastern Bhutan where 13 people lost their lives and leaving many injured and homeless. About, 1,900 homes, numerous schools, government offices and historical monuments were either destroyed or damaged. The full impact is still being ascertained. During this difficult period, we are comforted by the outpouring of support of friendly countries like India and others who have rendered much needed technical and financial assistance to undertake the massive relief work.

Given the increasing frequency of such severe natural calamities and its negative effects in many parts of the world, there is now a need for an institutionalized disaster preparedness and response mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels. In this context, the establishment of the UN Central Emergency Fund is an important step towards providing disaster relief that is urgently required for life saving operations. Bearing this in mind and as an expression of our continued support to the commendable humanitarian work of the United Nations, Bhutan has made a modest contribution to this Fund, which we hope to increase in the coming years.

Mr. President,

These are indeed difficult times with multiple crises hitting us simultaneously. The threat of climate change is real and its effects are occurring even as I speak. Global governance needs to be made more effective to help us address the global challenges more efficiently. In this interdependent world, it will be impossible for any country to act alone in resolving these crises. Therefore, as we gather here once again, to deliberate and find solutions to the many difficult problems confronting us, I conclude by reiterating my delegation's full support and cooperation in working towards addressing our common challenges.

THANK YOU AND TASHI DELEK!