



KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

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STATEMENT BY

**H.E. LYONPO RINZIN DORJE
MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN**

AT THE

**GENERAL DEBATE
OF THE
SIXTY-EIGHTH SESSION
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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Mr. President
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring to you, Mr. President, and through you to all the distinguished delegates, the warm greetings and good wishes of His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.

Allow me to also congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election to the Presidency of the 68th General Assembly. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you steer the important work of this session.

Mr. President,

I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to address this august assembly for the first time. I do so owing to the mandate accorded by the people of Bhutan to the Peoples Democratic Party at the second parliamentary elections held this summer.

The second parliamentary elections were yet another milestone on the path of democracy that Bhutan chose to undertake five years ago. From two political parties in 2008, a total of four parties contested in this year's elections. The people of Bhutan voted for change and ushered in a new government.

These, I believe, are signs of a vibrant democracy enabling the people of Bhutan to exercise their will through the ballot box. But we know that democracy needs to go beyond elections. We will, therefore, continuously work towards strengthening democratic institutions, rule of law, an independent judiciary, a vibrant civil society, an open and free media, and above all, a democratic culture that enables people to voice their aspirations and to live with dignity, equality and prosperity.

As we embark on a new phase in our relatively young democracy, we do so in full confidence that democracy in Bhutan is irreversible and on a firm footing. In this journey, we count on the support of our friends and the international community

Mr. President,

We meet at a time of extraordinary changes. While some have been able to achieve tremendous economic growth and prosperity, millions of people continue to languish in inhuman depths of poverty. Our relentless drive for economic growth has come at the cost of our environment. Climate is changing. Natural disasters hit us with increasing frequency and severity.

The natural question then is: how do we advance economic growth, promote societal progress and prosperity within the confines of nature? How do we lift the millions of people out of the vicious cycle of poverty? How can we ensure that we leave a

planet safe and secure for our children and grandchildren? These, I believe, are the key questions that confront us all.

And although we come from different parts of the globe with our unique historical backgrounds and cultural experiences, we are bound by our shared future. In today's interconnected and globalized world, we can only prevail if we come together as global citizens and work towards finding solutions for the sake of our common future. In this endeavor, Mr. President, as you have rightly stated, failure is not an option.

My delegation welcomes the theme - "*Post-2015 Development Agenda - setting the Stage*" - for this general debate. The question of post-2015 development agenda is important, especially for least developed and landlocked countries, who in many respects, have the most at stake. It presents the opportunity for all countries to share their experiences and the kind of development agenda that they would like to see in the post-2015 era.

Mr. President,

As we set the stage for a development agenda beyond 2015, the Millennium Declaration provides a strong foundation. In our search for a new development agenda, we must not forget the important principles contained in the Millennium Declaration, but emphasize their continued relevance. The MDGs inspired nations and a whole generation to improve lives of many people by creating synergies between nations and amongst people. All efforts must be undertaken to accelerate the realization of the MDGs in their last mile.

The Rio+20 outcome also outlined important principles on which the post-2015 development agenda should be built.

These principles must guide our efforts to come up with a holistic and transformative development agenda that puts people at the center of development and brings about shared prosperity and happiness to all. Within this broader vision, poverty eradication must form a central theme of the post-2015 development agenda. For Bhutan, the alleviation of poverty remains a challenge and features as a key priority in the current 11th Five-Year Development Plan.

Equally important is the need to bring about inclusive development, which is one of the priority objectives of the Royal Government of Bhutan. Targeted interventions are being planned to promote the livelihoods of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Bhutan.

Empowerment of women should constitute one of the main building blocks of the post-2015 development agenda. Any development agenda will fall short if it does not include the empowerment of women as a key component.

Issues related to youth and providing gainful employment to a growing young population is one of the critical challenges that my country continues to face. It is, therefore, vitally important that the post-2015 development agenda addresses the issues of youth as they are the key stakeholders of that era.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of a strong means of implementation in the post-2015 development agenda. Without this, the capacity of developing and least developed countries, to realize the post-2015 development priorities will remain severely challenged.

At the intergovernmental level, Bhutan will continue its close engagement in the work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals where we are pleased to serve as a member. We look forward to contributing to the intergovernmental negotiations towards the elaboration of a single post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. President,

The subject of development inevitably leads me to refer to my country's experience guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness. After all, this is a vision that has given character to my country. Happiness and development have come to mean many things, and there are indeed many experts and a rich body of literature on the subject. This august body has also adopted a Resolution on Happiness during its 65th session. At its 66th session, the Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming 20th March as the International Day of Happiness.

Happiness as a development policy must relate to individuals as well as governments.

It is the sacred responsibility of governments to ensure that conditions are created for its citizens to pursue their individual happiness within the larger aspirations of the country. All our achievements, including the peaceful transition to a democracy in 2008, as well as the progress realized in achieving the MDGs, have been the result of embarking on a people-centered development approach.

Encouraged by our positive national experience, Bhutan facilitated efforts to elaborate a holistic approach to development. We intend to share the findings with member states and the larger international community at an appropriate time. We hope this modest contribution will serve as a useful input to the ongoing discussions on post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. President,

While Bhutan has achieved significant socio-economic progress, we face many challenges and vulnerabilities, being both a landlocked and least developed country. Our economy remains import driven and dependent on a single export commodity.

Poverty, youth unemployment, natural disasters and vulnerability to adverse impacts of climate change, including glacial lake outburst floods, pose challenges. We will, therefore, continue to count on external support and assistance as we work towards achieving our long cherished goal of self-reliance and graduation out of the LDC category.

We recognize that a vibrant democracy should be built on a strong economy, which is essential to bring about improvement in the lives of the common people. Therefore, in the current 11th Five-Year Plan, the main thrust will be to promote, "Prosperity for All" through inclusive social development, accelerated green economic development and infrastructure development.

Mr. President,

The United Nations with its global scope and mandate remains the only universal organisation that can forge a global coordinated response to the pressing challenges, ranging from peace and security to development. The challenges of our times, however, are testing the United Nations and the resolve of its member states to work together. Every effort must be made to strengthen the role and efficacy of a United Nations that is just, democratic and representative and allows space for its members, including its smallest, to participate fully in its work. This is key to the legitimacy of an effective multilateral system.

We remain hopeful that under your able leadership, the 68th session will further advance work on the reform of the UN. The General Assembly must be revitalized and its role strengthened. The UN Security Council membership in both the permanent and non-permanent categories must be expanded in keeping with contemporary realities and to make the Council a more representative body.

Mr. President,

These are challenging times indeed. It calls upon us to seek the wisdom of those who created this great institution - to work together in the spirit of "international co-operation in solving international problems". We have the opportunity to not only strengthen the role of the United Nations and advance multilateralism, but also to define a holistic development agenda that will respond to the universal aspiration for happiness.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!