



# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

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STATEMENT BY

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71<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
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**Mr. President**  
**Mr. Secretary-General**  
**Excellencies**  
**Distinguished Delegates**

At the outset, I have the honour to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty The King and the people of Bhutan.

2. I congratulate you on your election as President of the 71<sup>st</sup> Session of the General Assembly and assure you of my delegation's full support in the discharge of your responsibilities.

3. Your distinguished predecessor, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, deserves our special appreciation for the excellent manner with which he steered the work of the 70th Session.

4. We meet at a time defined by breakthrough agreements. The 2030 Agenda, the Addis Agenda and the Paris Agreement stand testimony to our collective resolve to advance peace, security, human rights and sustainable development.

5. They underscore our commitment to multilateralism and serve as a reaffirmation of our faith in the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Together, they present a historic opportunity to secure the collective hopes and aspirations of humanity.

**Mr. President,**

6. We have undoubtedly made a good start to this monumental journey. Let us, however, be clear that many serious global challenges persist.

7. We continue to witness wanton acts of terrorism and protracted conflicts that undermine the security, well-being and human rights of millions. Terrorism is the most flagrant violation of human rights and we strongly condemn terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It afflicts many nations and peoples and the imperative to redouble international cooperation to combat this scourge is vital and urgent.

8. Over the last five years, at least 15 major conflicts have erupted around the world. Today, we are witness to the largest displacement of people fleeing violence and conflict since the founding of the UN.

9. The value of arms trade and global military expenditures has exceeded cold war levels. The current stockpile of nuclear weapons is enough to destroy our planet hundreds of times over. This unimaginable destructive power still looms as a grave threat. All these are an acute reminder that our quest for peace and security remains unfulfilled.

10. On the development front, significant gaps and challenges to achieving the SDGs confront us.

11. For instance, the UN Secretary General's July 2016 report on the SDGs highlights that one in eight people suffer from the absolute despair of extreme poverty. About 800 million people suffer from hunger. More than 2 billion are affected by water scarcity and 1.1 billion people live without electricity.

12. Similarly, thousands of children die mainly from preventable causes. Children make up nearly half of the almost 900 million people living on less than US\$1.90 a day. About 124 million children do not attend school and 2 out of 5 leave primary school without basic skills.

13. Much remains to be done in the pace of change towards gender parity and rights of women. We need to make concerted efforts to close the economic gap between men and women.

14. Likewise, glaring inequalities within and among nations persist despite substantial gains in global economic output. And addressing the employment challenge remains a daunting and complex task.

15. The risk of catastrophic climate change is no longer an abstract and long-term threat. Climate change is real and countries in special situations such as LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are the most vulnerable. We have all experienced the devastating and destabilizing impacts of climate change both in their frequency and intensity. In July this year, we in Bhutan suffered extensive destruction and damage to property and infrastructure caused by unprecedented flash floods.

16. And even as we deal with these longstanding challenges, the digital revolution, while opening new frontiers of opportunities by spurring global integration and catalyzing a Fourth Industrial Revolution, is ushering in new and interlocking challenges that have social, political, economic and security implications which we have yet to fully comprehend.

**Mr. President,**

17. We have to move past the euphoria of landmark agreements. Now more than ever before, we must find a new political resolve for urgent, focused, and comprehensive action that involves all stakeholders at the national, regional and international level - action that translates agreements into real and meaningful dividends for all peoples and for all countries.

18. The scale, scope, and complexity of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda should not be underestimated, especially given the timeframe of less than 15 years. The focus now and in the years ahead must be on implementation.

19. The principles and objectives of the 2030 Agenda are consistent with Bhutan's national development framework of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Guided by this timeless vision propounded by our Kings, we have always ensured that peace, happiness and well being of our people remain at the core of all our endeavours.

20. From a closed subsistence economy with no electricity and roads, Bhutan today is a rapidly emerging economy aspiring to achieve holistic development. With accelerated development of our hydropower sector, the next 15 years is expected to usher in even greater transformation.

**Mr. President,**

21. Bhutan has successfully aligned the SDGs with our national priorities and integrated them into our development-planning framework. The next decade remains critical as we seek to consolidate development gains and work towards realizing our national development goals of eradicating poverty, promoting inclusive and sustained economic growth, achieving self reliance and eventual graduation from the least developed category.

22. We will continue to work in earnest to ensure effective implementation of the SDGs so that we succeed in achieving the transformation that we all seek. This is particularly important as Bhutan faces immense challenges as a LDC and as a landlocked country. In this endeavour, the role of our development partners is critical.

23. The effectiveness of national strategies and investment plans, both in the formulation and implementation, depends on predictable commitments of financial, technical and policy support measures from development partners.

24. Our emphasis needs to shift from expressing approximate broad support measures to LDCs as a group to what is necessary at the country level. Financing for development, particularly ODA commitments, must be disaggregated to the country level so that they can be expressed in national budgets to finance short, medium and long-term investment plans. Without such predictability, it is impossible for LDCs to formulate integrated and effective strategies and plans necessary to achieve the SDGs.

25. In this regard, allow me to share some of our experiences to illustrate how predictability of financing allows for ambitious plans.

26. In 1992, we established the Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation - the world's first environmental trust fund - to protect our pristine environment and rich biodiversity through the implementation of conservation programs. Similarly, in 1998, we established the Health Trust Fund, which today sustainably finances our essential drugs needs that is fundamental to our free health care system.

27. Recently, in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund, we launched the Bhutan for Life Project (BFL) - an innovative financing initiative based on project financing for permanence model. Funds generated through the project will be used to maintain and manage the Bhutan's protected areas, parks and biological corridors in perpetuity as well as promote sustainable livelihoods for communities in the area.

28. We hope to expand this innovative financing model with development partners to other critical sectors such as sustainable energy, education and infrastructure development.

29. The success of the 2030 Agenda will ultimately hinge on the quality of partnerships between governments, the private sector and civil society at the national, regional and global levels. Partnerships in innovative financing for development will be vital for groups of countries in special situations, namely the LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. In this context, we look forward to the continued support of our development partners and well-wishers.

**Mr. President,**

30. Bhutan's commitment and contribution to conservation and preservation of the environment, protection of biodiversity and combatting climate change has been widely acknowledged.

31. This commitment dates back more than two decades, when we took a deliberate decision to shift our forest policy away from revenue generation towards environmental protection by banning the exports of raw timber despite our limited resources.

32. Further, in 2008 we pledged to safeguard our forests through a constitutional mandate that requires maintaining a minimum of 60 percent of our land under forest coverage in perpetuity. Today, 75% of our land is covered in forest and 38% of our total land area has been designated as national protected areas.

33. In 2009, we committed to remain carbon neutral but in reality, we are carbon negative and we look forward to ratifying the Paris Agreement soon, upon completion of domestic procedures.

**Mr. President,**

34. Effective multilateralism requires an effective United Nations - a UN that is “fit for purpose”. Since the founding of the UN, the world has undergone profound changes. Its membership has increased fourfold and the challenges we face have become more complex. Institutions cannot be static and must evolve and adapt to remain relevant and effective. The UN and its principal organs such as the Security Council must be reformed in keeping with contemporary realities to make it representative, transparent and accountable, and to enhance its legitimacy and credibility.

35. Likewise, the 2030 Agenda requires a UN Development System that is able to deliver integrated and coordinated policy support. In this regard, an ambitious outcome of the new Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review that matches the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda will be essential.

**Mr. President,**

36. Bhutan has been blessed with peace, progress and stability under the enlightened leadership of our Monarchs. We embraced democracy in a unique manner as it was imposed on us by our Kings and not borne out of popular unrest or strife. I am pleased to state that our transition to democracy is on a firm footing with democratic institutions in place, supported by a vibrant and independent media.

37. Peace and security is a shared concern and responsibility. Bhutan is committed to supporting UN peacekeeping endeavours to maintain peace, protect civilians and to

create the conditions necessary for lasting and durable solutions to conflicts around the world. Despite our limitations and constraints, we joined the fraternity of troop and police contributing countries in 2014. This is a reflection of our commitment to share the burden along with other member states. Today, we have a presence in 10 peacekeeping missions and we hope to broaden and deepen our peacekeeping engagement in the coming years.

38. As Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon completes his tenure this December, I wish to take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude and appreciation to him for his leadership, service and contributions to the important work of the United Nations. We wish him and his family every success in all their future endeavours.

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**Mr. President,**

39. Second chances are rare in life. The agreements we adopted in 2015 have given us an extraordinary opportunity to bring about greater peace, progress and prosperity for all. History will judge us by our ability to translate these compacts into meaningful and concrete results. Let us not squander this historic opportunity!

40. Addressing our challenges, whether related to peace, security or sustainable development, requires global action underpinned by the solidarity of all member states and bound together by a strong *esprit de corps* of the United Nations.

41. In this context, I would like to end with a quote by His Majesty The King of Bhutan:

*“Individual or even national success is a ship that cannot carry everyone together to the same place at the same time. Rich nations must stop to be mindful of the poorer ones left behind. Successful people must stop to remember those who didn’t make it. No nation today can stand alone in achievement. Time is slowly telling us that there can be no lasting individual success without success as a community and there cannot be lasting national progress and success if it does not fit into a future of global peace, harmony and equality. The world must progress together or fail together.”*

**Thank you and Tashi Delek!**

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