

**ADDRESS BY H.E. DASHO TSHERING TOBGAY
PRIME MINISTER OF BHUTAN AT THE 72ND SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates.

I bring warm greetings of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo.

Climate Change

Distinguished Delegates.

Today my thoughts are with the people of Mexico, who have suffered two terrible earthquakes this month.

My thoughts are also with the victims of other natural disasters that have recently brought pain and misery to people around the world: the three recent hurricanes that battered communities in the Caribbean and in the United States, and the devastating floods in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka that have taken more than 1200 lives.

Please join me in observing a moment of silence, to reflect on the suffering of these communities and to offer our prayers for their recovery.

Thank you.

These disasters are not isolated incidents. Experts are increasingly convinced that natural disasters like hurricanes and floods are made worse by climate change.

Climate change is a reality. Each of the last three years has been the hottest in recorded history. 16 of the 17 hottest years on record have all occurred in this new century. And this must alarm us, for we are only in 2017.

There is no room for complacency, hesitation or finger pointing, excuses or procrastination. The urgency is now. Our wellbeing is at stake. The survival of future generations is at risk.

The Paris Agreement is proof that we have accepted that climate change is a reality, and that we are willing to come together, to work together, to fight climate change together. I urge all countries to fulfill the promises they made in Paris.

As a landlocked mountainous country, we are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. And that's why we are particularly alarmed at unchecked environmental degradation, the root cause of climate change. We already experience flash floods, glacial lake outbursts, and severe and erratic weather patterns, the effects of which can be particularly devastating for a poor country.

But we will not give up. We will take action.

We have ratified the Paris Agreement and we are well on our way to fulfilling our pledges.

72% of our country is under forest cover, and more than half our country is protected as national parks, wild life sanctuaries and nature reserves. What this means is that we are the world's only carbon neutral country. In fact, we are a carbon negative country. In addition, we generate and export clean renewable electricity, and invest in green industries and organic farming practices.

After centuries of neglect, fighting climate change is complex and it is expensive. That is why it is critical that all countries fulfill their respective commitments. But that takes money. And hence the importance of climate financing mechanisms.

However, securing financing is one of the biggest challenges for smaller nations. So the role of climate financing institutions is essential.

We applaud the Global Environmental Facility, for financing more than 4000 environmental projects in 170 countries since its establishment in the 1990s.

The Green Climate Fund has also begun helping developing countries around the world respond to climate change through innovative and transformative interventions.

These institutions are critical for those who have the will but may not have the resources to take action. I applaud the innovative strategies and interventions that they have supported.

On our part, we have launched Bhutan for Life in partnership with the World Wildlife Fund. Bhutan for Life is an innovative financing mechanism, which will help safeguard our rich biodiversity until our government can assume the full cost of their protection.

Now is the time to scale up our support to GEF and GCF. This will enable all countries to fight climate change on a war footing, and help developing countries respond to its effects.

I am optimistic that we will be able to prevent the worst effects of climate change. But for that we must work together. While the threat of natural disasters will always remain, we can ensure that they are not directly linked to human-induced activity.

Poverty

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

The World Bank estimates that more than 800 million people live in poverty. For them, hunger, malnourishment and deprivation are everyday realities. And that reality – the scourge of poverty – silently kills countless millions every year.

I ask that you please join me in observing a moment of silence for the millions of people around the world, particularly children, who are suffering or dying from poverty and malnourishment.

Poverty has no place in this day and age. After all this era – our era – is blessed with unprecedented wealth, knowledge and technology, giving rise to levels of prosperity the world has never seen before. Yet millions are condemned to a life of poverty.

The SDGs are critical in this regard. They give us reason for hope. While every one of the 17 Goals will contribute to eradicating the scourge of poverty, our common resolve is articulated powerfully in the very first goal of the SDGs, which promises nothing less than to “end poverty in all its forms everywhere.”

Eradication of poverty, like climate change, is also complex and expensive. But according to one estimate, it would take only US\$175 billion per year to end extreme poverty. That should come as good news, as that is barely 0.32% of the current global GDP.

No doubt, we have a lot of work to do, but the SDGs provide a realistic roadmap for this important task. However there are no shortcuts.

In this connection, the Secretary General’s reform initiatives will ensure that the UN is fit for purpose and that it is able to respond to the call for transformation, to bring about shared prosperity for all peoples of the world.

I thank Secretary General Guterres for initiating these bold measures and call on all Member States to render full support to the important reforms.

We in Bhutan are blessed. Our enlightened monarchs have carefully balanced economic growth with social development, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation, all within the framework of good governance.

We call this holistic approach to development “Gross National Happiness,” or GNH. This unique philosophy guarantees all our citizens free education and free healthcare, while providing additional targeted interventions for the poor.

I am happy to report that our efforts are bearing fruit. Multidimensional poverty has already fallen by half and we are well on our way to reduce it still further, to 5%, within the next few years. Our success in reducing poverty is a tribute to the leadership of our Kings and the spirit of the people of Bhutan.

It is also due to the support of the UN and our other development partners, particularly India, Japan, the EU, ADB and the World Bank. Their continued support, partnership and generosity has helped us reduce poverty, achieve social growth, and prepare us for imminent graduation from the LDC category.

Terrorism

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates

I now ask you to join me in observing a moment of silence to remember the victims of global terrorism.

Recent acts of terrorism have brought pain and suffering to countless people in nearly every part of the world, and far too many lives have been cruelly lost. The horrific acts committed by terrorist groups undermine global peace and security, and Bhutan joins the call for united action to combat these extremists.

To win the fight against terrorism we have no option but to strengthen the United Nations, so that multilateralism and global cooperation are further enhanced.

Two years ago I joined many others in calling for UN reform. The Secretary General's reform initiatives will provide the much-needed framework to revitalize and strengthen the UN. Bhutan joins all member states in backing this bold endeavor.

But any UN reform would be incomplete without reforming the Security Council to reflect the changing realities of our world. As such, countries like India and Japan, Brazil and Germany must be called upon to serve as permanent members in the Security Council. And Africa must be appropriately represented.

We recognize that global peace and security is a shared concern and responsibility. As a peaceful country, one that has enjoyed the benefits of UN membership for over four decades, it is now time for us to contribute to global peace and security, even if only modestly.

Therefore, it was with a sense of pride and duty, that Bhutan joined the peacekeeping movement in 2014. Since then, we have gradually deepened our peacekeeping engagement in keeping with our duty to contribute, albeit in a small way, to the cause of global peace and security.

In doing so, our peacekeepers have, and always will, uphold the highest standards of integrity, ethics and professionalism while discharging their important responsibilities.

Today, our military and police officers serve in 11 peacekeeping missions. And the first ever military contingent from Bhutan is now ready for deployment to a peacekeeping mission.

However, the bedrock of global peace and security ultimately rests within each of our individual countries. And for that, every country must protect the rights of its citizens, strengthen participatory government, and enable economic opportunity for all. These are the very principles of democracy and freedom, which must be nurtured and strengthened.

Nine years ago, Bhutan embarked on the path of democracy. In an unprecedented move in human history, our King, at the height of his popularity, imposed democracy against the will of his people.

After a century of peace and prosperity under our enlightened monarchs, there was much apprehension and fear. But nine years on, it gives me great satisfaction to report that the state of democracy in Bhutan is well entrenched and irreversible.

Today, all the institutions of democratic governance have been established and are functioning well, along with a growing body of civil society, and a strong and vibrant media. We held successful elections in 2008 and 2013, and look forward to a third election next year, in 2018.

Mr. President

The importance of the United Nations has never been greater and the imperative for multilateralism has never been stronger. As we look to the future, Bhutan will continue working with all member states, to ensure that the United Nations continues to play an instrumental role in fighting climate change, eradicating poverty and maintaining global peace and security.

In this connection, I have the honour to conclude with a quote from our beloved King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck:

"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!