

GENERAL DEBATE STATEMENT UNGA78

**Statement by H.E. Lyonpo (Dr.) Tandi Dorji, Minister of Foreign Affairs
and External Trade of the Kingdom of Bhutan,
78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly 26 September 2023,**

Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset, I would like to convey the warmest greetings from His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan to the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Allow me to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Dennis Francis on his assumption as the President of the 78th Session of the General Assembly and assure you of my delegation's full support. Our gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th General Assembly, for the excellent guidance of our work during the past year.

We also welcome the theme for the 78th session of the UNGA, ***“Rebuilding trust and reigniting global solidarity: Accelerating action on the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals towards peace, prosperity, progress and sustainability for all”***, which is very relevant, appropriate and timely.

Our appreciation is also due for Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who continues to inspire and serve valiantly in advocating for peace, prosperity and wellbeing of the people and the planet.

Mr. President,

The initiatives laid in Our Common Agenda presents us with the opportunity to find new ways to work together for the common good, without undermining the existing agreements or mandates. Bhutan is happy to engage constructively in preparing for the Summit of the Future and work towards elaboration of a Global Digital Compact, which would, among other things, accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the SDGs.

The reforms of the UN which center firmly on implementing the 2030 Agenda will provide the essential impetus to galvanize support and progress in areas that have been found to be insufficient to meet the goals and targets within the set time-frame of 2030. This discussion assumes even greater urgency as we have passed the midpoint towards implementing the 2030 Agenda. This is further exacerbated by the conflicts and the looming climate emergency, which have thrown efforts towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and SDGs off track. We need to refocus our priorities by shifting gears and turning our commitments into action. In this regard, we support the Secretary General's SDG Stimulus which aims to significantly increase affordable, long-term financing for development and scale up affordable financing to ensure that the 2030 Agenda regains its traction.

Mr. President,

Under the guidance of our visionary leaders, Bhutan embarked on its development path with a holistic guiding philosophy that we call - Gross National Happiness (GNH). When the world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda in 2015, it was apparent that the SDGs presented high levels of synergy with our own development philosophy of GNH. Therefore, mainstreaming SDGs into our national plans and their implementation came very naturally. I am happy to share that Bhutan is well on-track to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and on our part reaffirm our commitment to undertake concrete actions to fulfill the 2030 Agenda.

Today, after more than five decades of planned economic development, Bhutan is set to graduate from the list of Least developed countries. It is the result of strong and benevolent leadership, guidance from successive Monarchs, hard work of our people and above all from the generous assistance from all our development partners. I take this opportunity to thank all our bilateral and multilateral partners, well-wishers and friends for their generosity and support without which we would not have been able to realize this milestone. While this achievement in our development journey is an occasion for celebration, we do so with the full knowledge of the vulnerabilities under which we graduate and the challenges that lie ahead.

The Royal Government looks forward to a smooth transition and the 13th Five-Year National Development Plan, which is set to commence early next year is critical to ensure that our graduation is smooth, sustainable and irreversible. Here

we look forward to the continued goodwill, support and assistance from our development partners. We are also hopeful that there will be universal support for the full implementation of the Doha Programme of Action that is critical for LDCs, graduating countries and newly graduated countries.

Mr. President,

Devastation and destruction from extreme weather events and natural disasters are taking place at levels never seen before, with studies pointing to climate change as the main responsible factor. I would like to convey Bhutan's sympathies and deepest condolences to all those affected by these unfortunate events in the past year.

Bhutan has also been affected by extreme weather phenomena with increasing frequency and ferocity of natural disasters such as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), flash floods, windstorms and landslides. Unpredictable rain and weather patterns have wrecked the lives of farmers and people across the country. These are serious causes of concern which have consequential impacts on the assets and livelihood of our people and our hard-earned development gains.

Bhutan falls within the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. The Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) working group report confirms that the rate of ice sheet loss increased at an alarming rate in the last three decades with the region experiencing glacier-mass loss by 65%. Even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C,

one-third of the glaciers in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region will disappear by 2100. For countries like ours, this means permanent loss of water resources for agriculture, hydro power generation, natural resources, and increased risk of disaster events. The melting of our glaciers also contributes substantially to rising sea-level and triggers a host of cascading effects including coastal erosion, flooding and permanent land submersion.

On our part we have done all we can and Bhutan's leadership in sustainable development and environmental stewardship has been recognised globally. We are fortunate that the past investments in environmental conservation are reaping climate dividends. Our forests 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. We are committed to remaining carbon neutral and reaffirm our pledge to fulfill our commitments to the Paris Agreement. While welcoming the breakthrough agreement to provide loss and damage funding for vulnerable countries on the frontline of the climate crisis during COP 27, we are hopeful that progress will be made and that it will be operationalised by COP 28.

In addition, we need to mobilize new and additional climate financing while ensuring balance between financing for mitigation and adaptation. We also need to forge strong international cooperation in coming up with viable projects and partnerships to scale up investments in alternative renewable energy to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, particularly in the manufacturing and transport sectors.

Mr. President,

Although being a small developing country, with a population of less than 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 contribute its part towards maintaining international peace and security. It signifies our commitment to share the burden along with other Member States. Since then, Bhutan has been working towards gradually broadening and deepening our engagement in the UN peacekeeping operations.

I am happy to share that in November 2022, Bhutan deployed its first uniformed contingent to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA). Bhutan has also pledged an integrated Formed Police Unit (FPU) and we are working towards fulfilling this pledge. We stand ready to deploy our FPU whenever the United Nations calls upon us to do so.

The Royal Government would like to express our appreciation to the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support of the United Nations Peacekeeping for their guidance and support to Bhutan's participation in this very important mandate.

Mr. President,

Effective Multilateralism must address the concerns of the less powerful nations of the world. The Global Governance architecture has not delivered the equity and inclusion that is required to ensure that the ideals of the Common Agenda are carried out. The increasing fragmentation, polarization, and growing inequity we witness in the world today, only serves as an urgent cry for strengthening multilateralism, for greater political resolve, solidarity, and compassion.

Bhutan has consistently maintained that the reform of the UNSC must progress hand-in-hand with the reform of the entire UN system. The reform must accommodate the interest and concerns of all Member States, particularly of those unrepresented and underrepresented. We believe that the UNSC must evolve to stay relevant and effective to address multifaceted challenges of our times and in this regard, Bhutan supports the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent categories of the UNSC. We continue to believe that in a reformed council, India and Japan must be included permanent members.

Mr. President,

Under the leadership of His Majesty the King, the government has initiated and implemented a number of reforms across all government agencies and sectors. Having learnt valuable lessons from the COVID pandemic, we are convinced that business as usual cannot be the norm. Urged by the expectations of our people, the

need to overcome our vulnerabilities and to progress as an advanced nation, we have undertaken major transformations so as to enhance public services, accelerate the economy, sustain the development progress while promoting and preserving our core values which are our tradition and culture AND our environment.

There are a number of foundations on which these reforms are built. One of the most important and critical of these is leveraging technology for nation building without which we will be left behind. With the enactment of the National Digital Identity Act, Bhutan became the first country in the world to enact a legal framework for implementing Self Sovereign Identity. This will serve as the foundation on which all other services will be accessed and provided to citizens digitally.

Over the past decade, strong political, social and economic institutions established under the guidance of our Monarchs have taken firm root to set the foundations for a functional and vibrant democracy. 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 promoting peace and security and a UN that is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Mr President,

In closing may I submit that the world has largely forgotten the COVID pandemic despite having killed close to 20 million people globally. We should however remember the vulnerabilities that we all faced, how ill prepared we were and the sufferings that all of us experienced collectively. We have all seen the best and

worst of humanity and global cooperation. Today as we emerge victorious from the pandemic we must learn from the lessons and prevent any such catastrophe from occurring in the future. From the Spanish flu in 1920 to SARS in 2002, it took nearly 80 years for a global pandemic to emerge, and ever since, we have seen rapid incidences of such potential pandemics such as MERS in 2012, Ebola in 2014, and Zika in 2016. As the name SARS COVID 2 suggests, COVID 3 may just be around the corner - brought about by climate change, massive loss of habitat and ever increasing interaction between humans and animals.

We must all acknowledge our interdependence and the importance of working closely together and collaborating with each other to combat our common challenges. While each of our countries have our own priorities, we must not forget that we share this world together and therefore we should all prioritize global wellbeing, preparedness and cooperation.

Together we can!

Thank you and Tashi Delek!