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**ASIAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY  
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS STANDING COMMITTEE  
THIMPHU: BHUTAN**



PARL/APA/PR-1/2017

31 August 2017

**Press Release**

A Meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) opened this morning in the Convention Centre in Thimphu.

More than 100 parliamentarians, parliamentary officials, and APA officials from 20 Asian countries are attending the two-day meeting on 31 August and 1 September. This is the first and biggest regional parliamentary meeting Bhutan is hosting.

Among the delegates are the President and General Secretary of the APA.

The Members of Parliament from Bhutan, including the 12 members of the two houses' Social and Cultural Affairs Committees, also attended the opening. Hon'ble Tshogpon Jigme Zangpo, Hon'ble Chairperson Dasho Sonam Kinga, and the Resident Coordinator of UNDP Bhutan also attended the opening.

The 12 members of the Social and Cultural Affairs Committees – five from the National Council and seven from the National Assembly – form the Bhutanese delegation.

In his keynote address at the opening as the guest of honour, His Excellency Lyonchhen Dasho Tshering Tobgay said that Bhutan was privileged to welcome and host the biggest gathering of parliamentarians to discuss social and cultural issues. He highlighted the importance of cultural discourse by the parliamentarians in the context of crucial roles parliamentarians played in society. However, he pointed out how grand 'ambitions' that such conferences came up with in the region were often forgotten afterwards, often due to bilateral differences.

Over the next two days, the delegates will deliberate on the nine resolutions, including one on Measures to Promote Cultural Diversity and Protect Cultural Heritage in Asia, Asian Integration through Information and Communication Technology, Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption, APA Women Parliamentarians, and Promoting Inter-Faith Dialogue, and Harmony, among World Religions.

The meeting began with the election of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Rapporteur of the Standing Committee Meeting. His Excellency Tshogpon Jigme Zangpo was unanimously elected as the Chairperson, Hon'ble General Nipat Thonglek from Thailand as the Vice Chair, and Hon'ble Yara Suos from Cambodia as the Rapporteur.

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In his opening remarks, Tshogpon Jigme Zangpo said Bhutan's concept of culture, as underlined by Gross National Happiness, is neither monolithic nor singular. So, it was fitting that Bhutan hosted this parliamentary discourse.

President of APA, Hon'ble Dr Nguon Nhel, said the meeting provided a platform for parliamentarians representing more than 60 percent of the world's population to discuss and exchange ideas, perspectives and experiences to seek possible solutions and strategic approaches to address the regional and international challenges.

The Secretary General of the APA, Hon'ble Dr Mohammad Reza Majidi, said the Asian countries are well-positioned to progress if parliamentary diplomacy was fully exploited in all its dimensions and manifestations.

The APA was born in 2006 out of the Association of Asian Parliamentary for Peace which was established in 1999. The APA comprises 42 Member Parliaments and 170 members. Bhutan's parliament has two seats in the APA.

The APA meeting is hosted by the Parliament of Bhutan.

The areas of interest and activity of the APA's Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs include cultural diversity, preventing trafficking of cultural objects, and promoting friendship and cooperation.

The meeting is attended by delegates from as far as Bahrain, Russia, Turkey, Cyprus, Iraq, Iran, and Kuwait.

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