

Opening Speech of the Speaker during the First Session of the First Parliament

1. His Majesty the King,
Members of the Royal Family,
Prime Minister,
Cabinet Ministers,
Chairman of the National Council,
Opposition Leader,
Senior government officials,
Foreign dignitaries, Media personnel, Ladies & Gentlemen I, on behalf of Members of Parliament and on my own behalf, would like to extend a warm welcome to this historic opening ceremony of the first session of the First Parliament of Bhutan.

2. Since the enthronement of our Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the year 1974, the people of Bhutan have been blessed with unprecedented peace, happiness and prosperity under his golden rule in the spirit of Gross National Happiness. Towards this end, His Majesty the Fourth King has left no stone unturned and has decentralized all the power to the people and handed over the government in the hands of the people by launching the Constitution, which has now given birth to a democratically elected government. With two political parties in the fray, the people of the country has voted and chosen Druk Phuensum Tshogpa to form the new government under the leadership of the Prime Minister, Jigmi Yoezzer Thinley. The new government is committed to align its policies and programmes to fulfill the aims and objectives of the Gross National Happiness through its policy of Equity and Justice. The government under Druk Phuensum Tshogpa must continue to work to eliminate and alleviate poverty, solve growing un-employment problem and work towards achieving balanced development growth in all parts of our country. As our country is endowed with rich natural resources, we have the potential to generate thousands of mega watts of electricity and earn millions in hard currency through the promotion of tourism in the country. The government will work towards harnessing the water resources for more electricity production and will frame policies and programmes to attract more tourists, which will augment the income level of the people, creating more job opportunities for the youth and raising the living standard of all the people. It is, therefore, important for all of us to work towards achieving these goals.

3. At the outset, I would like to avail this opportunity to extend my appreciation to the people of the four geogs of Radhi, Phongmey, Merak and Sakteng of Trashigang Dzongkhag for reposing their trust and confidence in me and giving me the opportunity to serve them by electing me as their candidate in the National Assembly. I, on my part would do everything possible to live up to the expectation and work hard in serving the people.

4. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to the Members of the National Assembly for having elected me as Speaker of this historic National Assembly. My heartfelt gratitude goes to Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition Party and to all the Members of the National Assembly for reposing their faith in me. You have given me the greatest opportunity to receive the rank and blessings from His Majesty the King and I will remain grateful and cherish this moment forever.

5. I pledge to serve the Tsa-wa-sum with utmost dedication and commitment to the best of my ability. I would commit myself to the advice and direction of His Majesty the Fourth King and His Majesty to carry out my responsibilities to the highest possible standards. I would also like to seek continued support and co-operation from the Members of Parliament to carry out my responsibilities effectively.

6. Our country has made unprecedented economic and social progress within the last few decades without compromising the rich tradition and cultural heritage. News flash of the first election and the smooth transition of the first democratically elected government was indeed a surprise to the outside world. Democracy is not new to us as the system of governance in our country has been functioning in a democratic way since the enthronement of the third hereditary King, Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck in 1953. All along the line, the people got the opportunity to decide for themselves what was best for them and accordingly plans and proposals were formulated. The people of the country submitted their requirement through their representatives in the National Assembly and decisions were taken by the National Assembly represented by the people, the monk body and the government. The democratic system of governance existed for many years with 87 sessions held so far.

7. Every Bhutanese is aware of the decentralization policies initiated from the Throne to enable the common people to become aware of their own needs and aspirations and to actively participate in the decision making process of the country. To take the decision process to the grass-root level, His Majesty the Fourth King set up the Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogdu (DYT) in 1981 and Gewog Yargye Tshogchung (GYT) in 1991 for the benefit of our people.

8. It should be noted that whatever the system of governance we have today is not new to us. This system existed for many years and has become stronger over the years with the devolution of the executive powers from the golden Throne to the elected Cabinet Ministers against the will of the people. The idea for a written Constitution for the country also originated from the golden throne as a result of which we have the first democratically elected government in place today. These changes have been initiated for the well-being of the people, strengthening the peace and prosperity of the country and to safe-guard the national security.

9. All the people including the people living in the remotest part of the country are well aware of the benefit of decentralized policy making system. Besides voicing their own needs and aspirations, they have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process on issues of national importance. We are fortunate to have Kings who have the interest of the people at heart and always dedicated to the welfare and development of the subjects. This is evident from the tremendous socio-economic progress and the peace and prosperity that we are able to enjoy today, all tangible like blooming flowers. It is the outcome of past karma and the unique rapport that co-exist between the monarchs and the subjects.

10. All the members of the Parliament are voted and chosen by the people to represent them and it is the duty of every one of us to live up to the expectation of the people. We have the mandate and it is our responsibility to strive hard to fulfill their expectations. As the representatives of the people, we are expected to function as a bridge between the people and the government with the highest commitment to live up to the wishes and expectations of His Majesty the King and the people.

11. Since the enthronement of our first King in 1907, we have seen and enjoyed unprecedented peace and prosperity in the country. As we celebrate the 100 years of monarchy, we all pray and commit ourselves to work for greater peace and prosperity in the country. As the representatives of the people, I would like to remind all to bear greater responsibilities and strive for excellence in delivering our services to the Tsa-wa-sum.

12. In the current session, we will be deliberating on the Draft Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan besides many important bills such as the National Assembly Bill, National Council Bill, Election Bill, National Referendum Bill, Public Election Fund bill and the Parliamentary Entitlements Bill. I would like to urge each one of you to actively participate in the deliberations keeping in mind the national interest and the implications that it would have in the future. All proposals for alterations and additions in the articles of the Constitution and the Bills should cater to further safe-guarding the security and sovereignty of the country and the well being of the people.

13. While performing our duties, we should bear in mind the single minded goal to conduct ourselves in the most democratic way bearing equal responsibilities so that we do not fall short of the goal of one nation, one people of His Majesty the King for ever lasting peace, prosperity and unity in our country.

14. As the Parliament is the highest body to frame all legislative laws of the country, all the members are requested to actively participate and submit your views and opinions in a free and frank manner as per parliamentary rules and regulations. All Bills should be discussed at the

committee level and then deliberated in the house to derive fruitful discussions and concrete outcomes within the limited time frame. I am hopeful that all of us will render every support to keep the debates within the agenda and to come out with tangible outcomes at the end of the session.

Tashi Delek