

Statement by H.E Mr. Wangchuk Namgyel, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan, at the 4th South Asian Speakers' Summit: *Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

1. His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Nasheed, Hon'ble Speaker of the People's Majlis, Her Excellency Madam Gabriela Cuevas Barron, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (I.P.U), Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (I.P.U), Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen.
2. On behalf of His Majesty the King, Parliament, and the People of Bhutan and on my own behalf, I would like to extend warm greetings to the distinguished Speakers and delegates attending the **4th South Asian Speakers' Summit** here in the beautiful city of Male. I would like to express our deepest appreciation to the Hon'ble Speaker of the People's Majlis and the I.P.U for inviting and giving us the wonderful opportunity to participate in the Summit.
3. It is of great honour for me to be part of the '4th South Asian Speakers' Summit on *Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*.' I am confident that the composition of the Speakers with diverse background and experiences will enable us to go beyond in ensuring a meaningful discussion.
4. For Bhutan, our development philosophy is maximizing Gross National Happiness (GNH). This development vision pursues happiness for every citizen through GNH policy interventions. It is to be understood that the essence of SDGs has always been there in the Philosophy of Bhutan's development, due to which today, Bhutan stands compliant to most of the SDG targets. Likewise, our five year plans are framed in line with the SDGs which are further elaborated into 17 National Key Result Areas (NKRA) and Agency Key Result Areas (AKRA).
5. In terms of Parliament's efforts in achieving SDGs, I am happy to report here that the Parliamentarians of the Third Parliament have been sensitized on SDGs and its targets and indicators subsequent to taking office in October 2018. Based on the Indore Declaration, the Parliament also passed a resolution whereby in every session of Parliament, a day will be dedicated to deliberate on the SDGs. In the recent parliamentary session, Goal 3- on Health and Goal 4- Education were debated in the house.

Let me also bring to the notice of this august gathering today that, for the purpose of monitoring the SDGs, the goals have been distributed based on

relevancy among the Committees of the National Assembly. In June 2019, a Joint Parliamentary SDG Committee for National Assembly and National Council was established to coordinate the oversight activities of parliament on SDGs. Further, to coordinate SDGs at national level, the Parliament also passed a resolution to establish a separate SDG Unit under the Gross National Happiness Commission.

6. In line with our country's happiness development philosophy, Parliament has long realized the importance of education for overall development of the country and hence, diverted substantial proportion of its resources towards education sector consistently throughout the plan periods. Similarly, the Bhutan Education Blueprint 2014-2024 recommends a minimum of 6% of GDP or 15% of total government expenditure on education sector. Bhutan also emphasized a holistic approach to education with an aim to equip its young population with unique cultural and ethical values, as well as universal values and globally applicable skills and competencies.

Today, almost all children of school going age in Bhutan are enrolled in the education system. The adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (NER) for the period of 5 years has been relatively consistent above 97%. This shows The Gender Parity Index for the NER as consistent at around 1.02 in the past few years indicating that the female NER for primary education was higher as compared to that of the male for all these years. Similarly, the gross enrolment in secondary education as of 2018 stands at 99%. The gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education in Bhutan is around 24% which is one of the highest in the region.

7. The Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) is a relatively new phenomenon in Bhutan. Yet, this has grown significantly in terms of enrolling children from 3-5 years in ECCD centers. The Gross Enrolment Rate in ECCD was merely 9% in 2014. Within five year, in 2018, the Gross Enrolment in ECCD stands at 23.4%. In the next five year, Bhutan aspires to enroll at least 50% of 3-5 years into ECCD to enhance school readiness. To cater to the children with disabilities, currently Bhutan has 16 Schools with Special Educational Needs Programme and 2 special schools catering to children with visual impaired and deaf. In order to enhance awareness among young people on SDGs, the Ministry of Education conducts SDG conference among young people on an annual basis. Bhutan, as one of the nine pilot countries of the Global Citizenship Education (GCED) selected by the UNESCO Bangkok, is developing the capacity of teachers and reviewing curriculum and learning

materials to prepare for GCED drawing the lessons from the Bhutanese inherent values and building on it.

8. **Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen**, Bhutan has had some success in reducing malnutrition. Between 2010 and 2015, stunting in Bhutan has been transformed from a “severe” public health burden to a “moderate” public health burden. As enshrined in our Constitution under the Principles of State Policy, let me inform Your Excellences that our country provides free access to health to all. And to combat under malnutrition, the Ministry of Health provides a maternal health package which includes supplementation programme for iron, folate and calcium; screening and management of pre-existing health conditions. Bhutan promotes eight Antenatal and four Post-Natal care visits. For child health, growth monitoring and provision of supplements and deworming are in place, as well as counseling on infant and young child feeding practices. The same, is also instituted in all schools. Boarding schools are provided with fortified rice and adolescent health friendly facilities are instituted in all health services.
9. With legislation and awareness in education, the visible outcome is that the Parliament has been playing a pivotal role in promoting decent work to safe and secure working environments. The employment system in Bhutan has internationally accepted standardized right at work, social protection and social dialogue services.

However, youth unemployment has been one of the emerging social issues in the country. The Bhutan Vision 2020 emphasizes the development of the private sector as an engine of growth, combined with the effort to support and promote young entrepreneurs, as a way to achieve its priorities for reducing unemployment. Bhutan believes that, increase in entrepreneurs and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) will create more jobs, improve living standards and help establish innovative technologies to keep pace with local and global needs. Critical Skills Development has been identified as a key strategy to address youth unemployment and hence the various Programmes such as, Entrepreneurship Development Programme, Technical and Vocational Training and Education, etc. are initiated.

10. Recognizing Climate Change as the greatest threat to humanity and future generations, Bhutan re-iterated our commitment to remain carbon neutral in 2009 despite our status as a small, mountainous developing country with other pressing social and economic needs. The Parliament ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 with the aim to be part of strengthening global response to

the threats of climate change by keeping a global average temperature well below 2° C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels. To protect the ozone layer by taking precautionary measures to control equitably total global emissions of substances that deplete it, with the ultimate objective of their elimination on the basis of developments in scientific knowledge and considering the importance of promoting international co-operation in the research, development and transfer of alternative technologies relating to the control and reduction of emissions of substances that deplete the ozone layer Bhutan also ratified the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and its Amendment. Bhutan is already spending its own resources for some climate change adaptation and mitigation actions with an objective for carbon neutral and climate resilient development. Our Hydropower projects are being built at great expense to take into account the need to withstand catastrophic glacial lake outburst flooding events. The Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation also provides local funding for projects addressing mitigation and adaptation.

11. **Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen..**We are doing our part and remain committed to a globally collective effort in addressing climate change, but now the time has come for us all to act more and collectively. We must work together with common approaches, in fulfilling our common goal to address climate change, as there is no need greater, or more important, than keeping the planet safe for life to continue.
12. Finally, I urge Your Excellences for a very interactive and successful Summit and pray that whatever we discuss here will benefit our people in the South Asia and every individual around the globe in general.

The delegation from Bhutan is very excited to engage with the excellences here and I am optimistic that this Summit will contribute to our shared aspirations of achieving SDGs. We feel very privileged and humbled by the opportunity and once again thank the Hon'ble Speaker of the People's Majlis and the Secretary General of the I.P.U for the invitation.

Last but not the least, my delegation and I would like to thank the Government and People of Maldives through the Peoples' Majlis for the warm hospitality extended to my delegation.

Thank you and *Tashi Delek..*