



**Joint UN Statement at the
13th Round Table Meeting, Thimphu,**

Mr. Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator

Kuzuzang Pola

Your Excellency, Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Honorable Mr. Haoliang Xu, UN ASG, UNDP Regional Director, Asia and
the Pacific and Regional UNDG Chair, ASG Nikhil Seth of UNITAR,
Excellencies, Dashos, members of civil society, distinguished
participants, colleagues from UN agencies and entities (based both
internally and externally), ladies and gentlemen



Introduction

As the UN Resident Coordinator of the UN in Bhutan I am humbled to address the RGOB and its development partners. I start by noting that the 'One UN voice' is a pillar of Delivering As One and thus this statement is made on behalf of the UN entities that support Bhutan's development and is a reflection of our continuous efforts to partner with Bhutan within a relevant, coherent and effective framework. These UN agencies and entities are:

- **Resident Agencies:**

- FAO, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, WFP + UNODC, UN

Women

- **Non-Resident Agencies:**

- IFAD, UNAIDS, UNCDF, UNCTAD, UNDESA, UNEP, UNESCO,

UNHABITAT, UNIDO, UNOCHA, UNOPS, UNV

- **And present also here today:**

- ITU, UNIC, UNITAR, WIPO



As I will speak on behalf of these UN entities, I request your flexibility on my time duration.

Socio-Economic development:

Over the last decades, Bhutan has experienced strong economic performance, which is supported by rapid growth in industry and services and includes the construction of three major hydropower projects. Discussions have started on Bhutan's graduation from the groups of LDC's via the Triennial Review conducted by the Committee for Development policy at the UN. We the UN will support the RGoB in this transition.

In the social sphere too, Bhutan has made impressive progress. The net enrollment ratio for basic education stands at 96.2 per cent. Bhutan is amongst the top 15 countries that have seen greatest improvements in the ICT Development Index where it is 117 out of 175 countries.



Good Governance:

Bhutan will celebrate the 10th year anniversary of Democracy next year. It has made great progress in governance through greater transparency and accountability. Bhutan is the 27th least corrupt country in the world. Bhutan ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption in 2016, reiterating its commitment to counter corruption. While the world became less peaceful, Bhutan was ranked the 13th most peaceful country in the world. With such significant progress on the economic, social and political fronts, Bhutan focuses on sustaining achievements, and on ensuring that development gains are equitable and benefit all Bhutanese people.

The UN in Bhutan notes with humility that we have had the opportunity to work together with and serve the Royal Government of Bhutan for the last four decades in addressing national issues, and being able to witness and support Bhutan's unique development trajectory.



Remaining Challenges:

Despite the significant progress, challenges persist. The multidimensional poverty index reflects that 12.7 per cent of Bhutanese still fall below the threshold in terms of health, education and living standards. Bhutan remains highly vulnerable to external shocks. Economic diversification commensurate with growing demands is yet to take place and is currently predominantly driven by the hydropower sector, which has limited potential for the creation of productive jobs to absorb a growing and an increasingly educated labour force. Unemployment rates among youth remain comparatively high, yesterday, honorable Lyonchheon quoted a figure of 13.2 %. Bhutan is also confronted with emerging social challenges such as: disabilities; substance abuse; domestic violence and gender-based violence; child protection issues; and youth-related issues. While a notable improvement in women's participation in local elections of 11 per cent was significant, more attention is needed in enhancing women's political participation. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the members



of civil society who assisted the RGoB in achieving this milestone. Despite a remarkable reduction, neonatal mortality – deaths occurring in the first 28 days of birth – is still high, accounting for 70 per cent of infant and more than half of under-five deaths. Attention needs to be also paid to address non-communicable diseases that now account for over three-quarters of all deaths in Bhutan and the probability of premature deaths, before the age of 70, from one of the four main Non-Communicable Diseases is one in five. Climate change impacts such as flood occurrences and potentially severe fluctuations in seasonal weather patterns, can have significant consequences for both lives and livelihoods in Bhutan and affect long-term sustainability of its hydropower and agricultural based economy.

UN’s Support to RGoB and 12th FIVE YEAR PLAN linkage with SDGs:

The United Nations agencies that work in Bhutan is already responding to these challenges in close collaboration with the RGOB and with other national and international partners.



We will continue supporting the RGoB in promoting inclusive economic growth, promoting climate and disaster resilience, improving access to and availability of weather and climate services, mobilizing the potential of youth and women, and promoting increased access to and usage of essential social services. The UN will continue creating enabling conditions for a food- and nutrition-secure economy, promotion of rule of law and access to justice and protecting and empowering vulnerable groups—including institutionalizing social protection schemes especially for women and children, and improving data availability and usage for decision making purposes in concert with the RGoB. We are committed to taking the lessons of Development that have been achieved here in Bhutan (for example in the area of Gross National Happiness, such as respect for the environment, accountability to the people and transparency, etc) to the wider international community. We will be inspired by the resolution adopted by the General Assembly 65/309 in 2011 and titled “Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development” and I quote:



“Conscious that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption can impede sustainable development, and recognizing the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and well-being of all peoples”

Some say Bhutan is a small country, but in a world of challenge and upheaval I believe its leadership is a beacon to the World with respect to holistic development that is both pro people and pro planet.

We look forward to working very closely with the RGOB of Bhutan in making the SDGs a reality for all Bhutanese. The similarities between Bhutan’s development philosophy of Gross National Happiness and the SDGs both of which pursue a sustainable socio-economic development path are very significant and were comprehensively detailed yesterday by Aum Doma. A rapid integrated assessment conducted by the UN in



October 2015, indicated high levels of integration of the SDG targets already into the 11th Five Year Plan. Out of 143 SDG targets, 134 SDG targets were included in the 11th Five Year Plan. Similarly, a preliminary review of the 12th Five Year Plan that is currently under formulation, shows that the 16 National Key Result Areas are closely related with the SDGs.

Changing financial environment (Addis Ababa Action Agenda; changing partner presence; new financing windows)

We stand committed to support Bhutan in its development journey, and we are acutely aware of the changing global ODA patterns and its implications on UN's operations globally and on countries directly, including Bhutan. For this, we look forward to working very closely with the RGOB in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. The UN will support Bhutan in exploring and accessing alternate sources of financing and in so doing, we will support the building of an evidence-based investment case to attract investors to partake in the nation's



unique conservation journey, with special emphasis on the achievement of, SDG 1 on poverty eradication, SDG 13 on Climate Action, SDG 15 on Life on Land, and their essential linkages to the other SDGs.

Constant and Changing roles of UN Agencies

As always, the Convening power of the UN – most especially in an international context – is and will remain our key comparative advantage. Given the global political and environmental challenges we face, we the UN, as always, place our good offices at the service of the RGoB.

Take this opportunity to thank the RGoB and the Royal Bhutan Army for the and 48 personnel who are currently serving and 17 who have already served with UN Peacekeeping.

The UN system in Bhutan will remain a relevant, critical, and committed partner of the RGoB and its citizens, the UN will increasingly engage in providing innovative solutions to the government. That increasingly will be upstream policy work.



This will be pursued through: the use of global and regional expertise; enhancing local capacity to collect, generate, analyze and translate relevant and reliable strategic data and information; and using limited resources more efficiently by leveraging and prioritizing investments for sustained development. With respect to innovation, we will bring best-case practices from the international arena and help with their contextualization to the needs of Bhutan.

Khada Lap Thuengo

which roughly translates as What you say and what you do must be in harmony.

You will note that I have not specifically mentioned the work of any individual UN agency/entity in this statement. The reason is that like the RGoB, we in the UN are currently developing the UN strategic framework



known as UNDAF-One Programme (2019-23) with our counterparts within the RGoB, civil society and the private sector.

We will adopt an inclusive planning process – a whole of society approach – guided by the RGOB model. We will be guided by the 12th plan (with special consideration for the 3 ‘C’s of the RGoB which are coordination, collaboration and consolidation).

The UNDAF-One programme is where the UN agencies and entities will come together with specific and detailed contributions which are focused on delivering results. This accountability framework will help ensure that what we say and what we do is in harmony.

We look forward to engaging with all our partners, CSOs, and private sector that are gathered here, and including many other stakeholders.

We will strive with both our hearts and minds to follow-through on implementing the specific commitments we make in the UNDAF-One Programme.



In conclusion, let me reaffirm the commitment of the UN system to contribute and support the implementation of the 11th Five Year Plan and formulation process of the 12th Five Year Plan and its implementation through the “Delivering as One” approach.

Thank You and Tashi Delek!