

APRIL 2013

STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. KESANG WANGDI

AMBASSADOR AND LEADER OF DELEGATION OF BHUTAN

AGENDA ITEM 8: POLICY ISSUES FOR THE ASIA AND PACIFIC REGION

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

**Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

1. Let me begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chairperson, on your election as the Chair of the 69th Session of ESCAP. My delegation is confident that you will effectively steer our deliberations towards a successful outcome. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

Mr. Chairperson,

2. We meet at times of extraordinary and challenging circumstances. While we have achieved unprecedented economic growth and prosperity, we are confronted with a host of new challenges, from global economic crises to increasing natural disasters and growing inequalities. Millions of people continue to remain outside the wave of growth and prosperity. The clear and present

danger posed by climate change and the resulting natural disasters threatens our survival. The unfortunate events of the last few years have demonstrated our exposure and vulnerabilities to the dangers and consequences of these multiple shocks.

3. It is in this context that my delegation welcomes the theme for this year's session, *"Opportunities to build resilience to natural disasters and major economic crisis"*. In this world of global interconnectedness, no nation, big or small, will remain insulated from these shocks. The sad reality is that it is often the poorest of people in the developing world who feel the impact of these crises most severely.

4. While impossible to determine where and when the next economic crisis or imminent natural disaster would occur, the fact remains that the development gains that we have made can easily be undone by the adverse shocks emanating from natural disasters and economic crises. In these times of uncertainty, it becomes even more crucial to build dynamic resilient systems in order to prepare ourselves to effectively meet these shocks and challenges and for sustaining the progress that we have already achieved.

Mr. Chairperson,

5. Nations are today working towards devising concrete policies and creating effective systems to weather economic storms and natural disasters. Bhutan has also seen more than its fair share of natural disasters as well as felt the impacts of

the global economic crisis. While the National Disaster Risk Management Framework 2006 continues to guide all disaster management activities of the Royal Government, our experience from having suffered natural disasters highlights the necessity for disaster management legislation, and the promotion of systematic disaster risk management and response to deal with disasters. As a result, our Parliament enacted the Disaster Management Act 2013, which seeks to decentralize disaster management activities and empower the nodal institutions at all levels with the legal status to implement disaster reduction strategies more effectively.

6. The close link between disaster and development is an established fact. The increasing losses and cost of recovery and reconstruction after disasters have impacted many countries. But despite repeated disasters and painful experiences, development practices and procedures do not always incorporate disaster reduction concerns in our socio-economic development Plans and Policies.

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7. Bhutan has further worked towards mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into its national and local development plans and activities. We have developed a Protocol for Policy formulation, which is used as a guiding tool in the incorporation of disaster risk management plans into local planning process. The next 11th Five Year Development Plan integrates disaster risk reduction as one of 16 key result areas. Disaster risk reduction is also reflected as a crosscutting issue in the local development planning guidelines. The main concepts and issue of disaster risk reduction is being incorporated into our education curricula.

8. All these initiatives have been possible with the support of technical assistance from UNISDR and regional advisory services of UNESCAP. I wish to extend our deep appreciation to UNISDR and ESCAP for their continued support in this area.

Mr. Chairperson,

9. The theme study undertaken by ESCAP contains many important recommendations, amongst which enhancing regional cooperation is key to building our resilience, especially since economic crises and natural disasters respect no boundaries. Within this regional cooperative framework, my delegation is of the view that it is important to also share knowledge and acquire best practices to better deal with future crises.

10. We note that the issue of building resilience was one of the key messages transmitted by the Executive Secretary of ESCAP on behalf of from the five

regional commissions to the Third Meeting of the UN SG's High Level Panel in Bali this past March. Any post-2015 Development Agenda would be incomplete if it does not have resilience as an integral part of an equitable and sustainable future in the post-2015 world.

Mr. Chairperson,

11. My delegation welcomes the convening of the Ministerial Panel on the Post 2015 Development Agenda during this session. While our views on this important matter have been shared in greater detail at recent fora, including the GA's Open Working Group on SDGs in which Bhutan is a member, allow me to highlight that as in many other states, our national reflection on priorities for the Post Development Agenda are fairly well advanced. The GA's adoption in July 2011 of resolution 65/309 entitled "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development" encouraged us to work further towards the articulation a New Development Paradigm, which we feel, offers a response to the call for a transformative SDG framework and Post 2015 Development Agenda. We look forward to sharing more on this with the broader international community at other occasions.

Mr. Chairperson,

12. Since establishment of democracy in 2008 and in the first five years of an elected government, Bhutan has done fairly well. In the past five years, growth rate of the economy was maintained at about 9% annually and the economy

expanded by 70%. Per capita income rose by 59%, poverty halved from 23.2% to 12% and unemployment shrunk from 4.2% to 2.5%.

13. With the conclusion of the term of Bhutan's first democratically elected Government this week, and the establishment of the interim government under the leadership of the Chief Justice, our fledgling democracy's tryst with destiny continues. Elections to the 2nd National Council of Bhutan, the apolitical constituent of Bhutan's Parliament, was held on 23rd April 2013 and results already declared. The country now prepares for the Primaries next month and General Elections to the National Assembly on 13th July 2013 to determine who will constitute the next government. Fully cogniscent that these events represent the essence of democracy, the empowerment and right of individuals to choose their leaders, Bhutanese across the country are mindful of the sacred duty and privilege their vote represents. Together with the positive indicators cited earlier, these developments help advance our pursuit of GNH.

14. In concluding, let me take this opportunity to express our deep appreciation to ESCAP for its efforts and support towards advancing regional cooperation and greater sense of shared purpose and solidarity. My Government commends Madam Executive Secretary, Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, for her outstanding leadership and commitment and thanks her for bringing us together once again for this year's session.

Thank you & Tashi Delek.