

**Hon'ble Minister's Keynote address at the NHRD Launch
Event
11th Round Table Meeting
(01 Sept 2011)**

Hon'ble Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,
Dashos, Aums and dear colleagues;

I am very pleased to be here today at the Launch of the 2011 Bhutan National Human Development Report in conjunction with the 11th Round Table Meeting. Let me take this opportunity to join our prime minister and other colleagues to extend a warm welcome to all delegates from our development partners to the 11th Round Table Meeting for Bhutan. I hope that you will find enough evidence to derive satisfaction in what we have achieved with your support and, more importantly I hope, inspiration to continue our collaboration towards helping us to address current and emerging challenges.

The first National Human Development Report launched in 2000 was titled **“Gross National Happiness and Human Development: Searching for Common Ground.”** As the first report of its kind on Bhutan, it traced the country's human development history from 1961 when Bhutan began the process of pursuing planned socio-economic development. Guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), first conceived by none other than our visionary Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, it highlighted the tremendous socio-economic progress we have made since 1961 while at

the same time successfully enhancing the quality of our natural environment and preserving our rich tradition and culture.

The second National Human Development Report launched in 2005 titled “**The Challenge of Youth Employment**” assessed the economy through the lens of the human-centred development index and analysed opportunities for the youth of Bhutan.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

It is indeed most befitting that this 3rd National Human Development Report of 2011, which we are about to launch, focuses on the theme “**Sustaining Progress: Rising to the Climate Challenge.**” You would agree with me that until recently, climate change was not taken as seriously as it ought to have been and viewed largely as a vested agenda of environmental and academic interest groups. Political leaders, development policy-makers and practitioners of most countries did not appreciate the linkage between climate change and the socio-economic wellbeing of their people. On the flip side, not enough was done by environmentalists to integrate development needs and approaches in finding solutions to adapt to climate change and instead opting for conventional scientific approaches such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

However, it is encouraging to know that there is now general acknowledgement that we can no longer afford to separate climate

change and development discourses and approaches. The negative impacts of climate change threaten to undo whatever progress we have achieved so far in terms of socio-economic development, and in fact, the very survival of our planet. There is also no denying the fact that most climate change impacts will predominantly affect the world's poorest people as they possess low financial and technical capacity to adapt to climate variability and change. Alternative development pathways, such as GNH that we are promulgating, will influence the capacity of communities and countries to adapt to climate change and will also determine future greenhouse gas emission pathways.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

While Bhutan is a net carbon-sequestering country and has accorded the highest priority to environmental protection, it is not spared from the ill-effects of climate change that is not of its own making. Being a mountainous country with a very fragile geo-physical environment, Bhutan remains at significant risk of localized impacts caused by global climate change. We have already experienced glacial lake outburst floods, flash floods, prolonged periods of drought, erratic rainfall patterns and increasing frequency of windstorms and rainstorms. The rapid melting of our glaciers, receding snowline, and drying streams and rivers are cause for serious concern. Our rapid socio-economic development fuelled by an abundance of natural resources may risk being relegated to history as climate change will negatively affect our water resources, agriculture systems, forests and biodiversity. In

addition, natural disasters and climate induced human and animal diseases are likely to increase in the coming years.

Being a least developed country with a very fragile economic base (being heavily dependent on hydro-electricity), Bhutan is not in a position to cope with the challenges of climate change on its own despite the best of intentions and the strongest of commitments. As you may be aware, we have made every effort to integrate conservation of the environment as well as the promotion of tradition and culture in our policies and plans for development. In fact, our Constitution mandates us to maintain a minimum of 60 per cent of our territory under forest cover for all times to come. To this end, we have already placed over 50 per cent of the total land under a network of protected areas and biological corridor system.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

Bhutan has always acted as a responsible member of the global community. Based on our concerted effort, the United Nations have unanimously adopted the resolution to adopt the pursuit of happiness as the ultimate goal of development. Following this historic event, our wish is that every government use GNH as a software for operating the hardware they already possess to make the world a much better and safer place to live in by moving away from pursuing limitless economic growth based on mindless consumption of the earth's limited resources.

Further to demonstrate our commitment to addressing climate change, Bhutan had pledged to ensure that the country's carbon emissions do not exceed the sequestration capacity of its forests at the 2009 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's 15th Conference of Parties in Copenhagen. Towards fulfilling this commitment, the recently adopted Bhutan's Economic Development Policy incorporates resource sustainability and environment conservation as key principles for pursuing a green economy. This would entail that we have to forego more lucrative economic growth opportunities such as mining and manufacturing and limit our options to renewable energy, eco-tourism and organic agriculture.

Bhutan has also recognised the need to take a regional approach if global commitments and national priorities linked to addressing climate change are to be effective. While it fully subscribes to the position of individual countries on global issues according to their own national priorities, there is a need to form regional consensus around issues of common concern. In view of this need, Bhutan has initiated a process of bringing together the four countries lying on the southern watershed of the eastern Himalayas, namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal to develop a regional framework for coping with climate change. These four countries are equally at risk of climate induced disasters such as GLOF, flash floods, droughts and cyclones and the resulting impact on food, water and energy security and biodiversity. This framework is scheduled to be

endorsed by the heads of governments of the four countries at the “Bhutan Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas’ in November this year.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

As I have reported, Bhutan is fully aware of its vulnerability to climate change and it is taking necessary steps to formulate national strategies on climate change addressing both adaptation and mitigation needs. It has recognised that Integrating climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as disaster risk reduction into development policies and programmes holds the key to combating climate change. Therefore, in line with the recommendations of the National Human Development Report 2011, the Royal Government of Bhutan recognizes the importance of mainstreaming climate change issues into development policies and programmes. We are confident that the Bhutan Human Development Report 2011 will facilitate a clearer understanding and implementation of the process in a more holistic manner.

Allow me also to reiterate that we are only too aware of our limitations and that our effort alone is simply not enough. For a small nation like ours, without concurrent regional and global initiatives, our national initiatives would border on the edge of futility. However, it is also abundantly clear that no such initiatives will materialise without the genuine commitment of support from the international donor community. Unless, new and additional financial resources to cover the full incremental cost of tackling climate change are made available, we may

yet be fighting a losing battle to save the planet and humanity despite the best efforts of small developing countries like Bhutan. I, therefore, appeal to you to look beyond political and economic interests in considering your development assistance and come forward with your generous support to fight climate change at all levels.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

In concluding, let me congratulate Ms. Claire Van der Vaeren, Resident Representative of UNDP and colleagues at the UN office and the GNHC for coming up with this excellent National Human Development Report for 2011. Let me also convey to Your Excellency, Mr. Ajaya Chibber, UN Assistant Secretary General and through you, to all the UN agencies, the sincere appreciation of the people and Royal Government of Bhutan for all the support extended to Bhutan and for their continued fruitful engagement in Bhutan. May I also take this opportunity to thank the distinguished representatives and delegates from all our other development partners for helping us to reach where we are now. We hope that you will continue to accompany us on our journey towards achieving our dream of becoming a true GNH country.

Tashi Delek!!!