



## **Joint UN Statement at the 11<sup>th</sup> Round Table Meeting, Thimphu, September 02, 2011**

***To be read by Ms. Claire Van der Vaeren, UN Resident Coordinator***

*Your Excellency, Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Minister-in-Charge of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Works and Human Settlement [Co-chair of the RTM]*

*Your Excellency, Dr. Ajay Chhibber, UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific [Co-chair of the RTM]*

*Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen*

It gives me immense pleasure to address the Royal Government of Bhutan and its development partners at this 11<sup>th</sup> Round Table Meeting on behalf of the United Nations system. This joint statement is made on behalf of 19 UN entities who support Bhutan's development *[and is a reflection of our strive to partner with Bhutan in a coherent and effective manner]*.

This country has undergone a historic political transition in the past few years. The steps it has taken with support from its development partners to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the long-term vision of Bhutan 2020 as articulated in the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, have already produced considerable results. Bhutan is recognized today for its philosophy of Gross National Happiness, a people-centered development approach which is integrated in national policies and in school curricula. In this context, we congratulate the government on the adoption of the resolution on "Happiness: Towards a holistic approach to development", by the UN General Assembly in July 2011.

The Mid-term Review (MTR) of the 10<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan confirms that Bhutan is on track to achieving its planned targets. We welcome in particular the Government's concerted efforts to reduce poverty, address the needs of vulnerable groups, and create the conditions for sustained economic and social development.

At the same time, and despite high economic growth over the years, the review also revealed persisting challenges in reaching the unreached in poor rural areas towards achieving the poverty reduction target of 15% across all districts. Youth unemployment and gender parity in tertiary education are MDG targets still requiring attention. In a rapidly changing society, other key areas deserve continued focus, such as: prevention of violence against women and children; increased participation of women in public-decision making; the maternal mortality rate; the spread of HIV/AIDS and STIs; and controlling the growing burden of non-communicable diseases.

*Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen*

In this context, climate change poses new challenges. The increasing impact of climate change on Bhutan's water resources, ecosystems and human health could reverse some of the development gains that have already been achieved *[and hinder further progress]*.

In the face of these emerging challenges, there is an urgent need for Bhutan to build resilience to buffer the impacts of climate change through adaptation and mitigation measures *[notably by generating resources for adaptation, capacity building, advocacy and education, and transfer of technology]*. In this regard, we welcome the Climate Summit that will be hosted by Bhutan in November this year and the adoption of a local climate adaptive methodology (LoCAL) for performance based climate resilience financing at the local level.

As outlined in the Istanbul Programme of Action for Least Developed Countries *[for the Decade 2011-2020]*, there is also a need to strengthen the capacity to understand, accept and prepare to tackle emerging challenges posed by climate change and the losses caused by climate-induced disasters. The UN will continue to support implementation of the National Disaster Risk Management Framework and the upcoming disaster risk reduction legislation. As agreed during the International Conference on Disaster Management and Cultural Heritage held in Thimphu in December 2010, we are committed also to support the integration of cultural heritage in disaster prevention and recovery.

Furthermore, we are happy to note that elements of a low carbon economy and sustainable development are now visible in various government policies and strategies *[such as the Economic Development Policy]*. Bhutan will benefit immensely from the adoption and implementation of a low-emission climate-resilient development strategy (LECRDS), which is expected to simultaneously address the threats, risks, vulnerabilities and uncertainties associated with global climate change and other pressing developmental needs that it faces in its pursuit of sustainable development.

The Rio+20 Summit next year will take place amidst economic, social and environmental realities of a world markedly different from Rio 1992. It can be an opportunity for Bhutan to highlight its successes and garner support in its transition to a green economy. The UN stands ready to support an inclusive preparatory process for Rio +20.

#### *Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen*

As we are at the threshold of the Royal Government of Bhutan's preparation for the 11<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan and that of the next United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), we look forward to the engaging in substantive consultations on their formulation. We welcome the Royal Government of Bhutan's commitment to pursue the fight against poverty in the next Five Year Plan, and to provide access to quality basic services, balance rural productivity investments with the demands of urbanization, ensure equitable development across the country, and expand the partnership with the private sector.

We aim to remain engaged in building strong central institutions and well equipped local governments, mobilizing the potential of youth, creating enabling conditions to protect and empower vulnerable groups including institutionalizing social protection schemes, especially for women and children, and fostering the emergence of an organized civil society. To support these endeavours, the UN can help bring in experiences from other countries and foster South-south partnerships.

Let me end by reaffirming the commitment and support of the UN System to help bring about progress towards achieving all of the MDGs and other goals of the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan through its joint “Delivering as One” approach at the country level. We look forward to pursuing our collaboration with the Royal Government, other development partners, the private sector and civil society to help Bhutan go the last mile, and beyond.

Thank You and Tashi Delek!