

Eleventh Round Table Meeting
Thimphu, September 1 & 2, 2011
Statement of the Swiss Delegation

1. **Bilateral relations** between Switzerland and Bhutan are excellent. We value our longstanding cooperation and are particularly proud to accompany Bhutan in a critical political transition. Under the leadership of its first elected government, Bhutan has made significant steps in the democratisation process. Bhutan's continued economic growth is also an encouraging element for the future. Switzerland congratulates Bhutan for the significant achievements made since the historical political transition of 2008 and the last Round Table Meeting.
2. While seeing a fundamental political change, Bhutan has managed to keep its vision of a holistic approach to development. The **Concept of Gross National Happiness** put forward by the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, is known much beyond your borders. Bhutanese persistence to live up to this vision in its development process is a lesson for all of us, developed and developing countries. This is a remarkable contribution your country has made to the international community. Switzerland is honoured to partner with a country which pursues such a development approach.
3. Bhutan is now at midpoint of the **Tenth Five year Plan**. The Mid Term Review Report and the documentation for this Round Table Meeting provide very useful information on achievements made and challenges ahead. We would be interested to learn even more on how the Government plans to concretely address the challenges mentioned.

Over the last years Switzerland has focused its support on **governance**, a priority of the 10th Plan. The strengthening of local governments and the provision of checks and balances in the system are, and remain, critical. Our support to the Local Governance Support Program and to a few specific institutions, such as the Judiciary and the Anti Corruption Commission, reflect our common goal to strengthen key players in a democracy. The nascent development of the Civil Society in the country is also promising. Their contribution to a culture of open debate is important.

4. But governance alone cannot feed the country. **Employment creation and local economic development** are as important for sustainable development. The rural economy needs particular attention. Interventions which take care of strengthening both rural governance

and promoting employment and income seem particularly appropriate. The Participatory Forest Management Program supported by Switzerland is an illustrative example.

5. A central issue in the Millennium Declaration is the principle of non-discrimination. Switzerland is aware that Bhutan has the firm intention to comply with this principle as well as the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Switzerland nevertheless is concerned about cases of **discrimination against persons belonging to minorities**. We encourage the Royal Government of Bhutan to fully guarantee the rights of all its citizens in accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.
6. Switzerland is also concerned about the future of the people living in the refugee camps in Nepal. On the occasion of the Universal Periodic Review in December 2009, Switzerland recommended that the Government and, if necessary, the Parliament accord a priority to seeking a constructive solution to the **refugee problem**, respecting the rights of those concerned, and to stepping up dialogue with the international community and the United Nations humanitarian agencies. Bhutan has accepted this recommendation. We look forward to knowing more about the steps taken.
7. Switzerland is deeply committed to the total abolition of capital punishment worldwide. We would like to **congratulate Bhutan on the abolition of the death penalty**. Bhutan has assumed the role of a forerunner among Asian countries. Switzerland also is committed to the elimination of torture and has supported the elaboration of an optional protocol to this convention. Switzerland therefore encourages Bhutan to sign and ratify the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment and to incorporate the definition and prohibition of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment into its national legislation.
8. We would also like to invite the Bhutanese government to **sign and ratify** the International “Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights”, the International “Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” and ratify the “Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial discrimination” to which it has been signatory for over 30 years.
9. Switzerland would like to once again express its appreciation of the important development results achieved in the recent years in Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan is a trusted and appreciated partner.

The Government of Switzerland and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation have been longstanding partners of your country. For the future, the Government of Switzerland is presently assessing the possibility to support Bhutan beyond 2013. HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation has made the decision to pursue its engagement in Bhutan during the next five year plan period with a focus on rural livelihoods, employment and support to the decentralization and democratization process.

We thank the Royal Government of Bhutan for the excellent preparation and arrangements for this Round Table Meeting.

We wish the Royal Government of Bhutan, His Majesty the King and all the people of Bhutan a peaceful and prosperous future.

Thank you and Tashi Delek