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Welcome Address

I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to felicitate the Smithsonian Institute for the successful completion of Bhutan's cultural participation at the Folklife Festival on the National Mall. The Festival was a celebration of Bhutan's unique approach to life in the 21st century as defined by the national policy of Gross National Happiness [GNH].

The Festival also gave Bhutan the wonderful opportunity to showcase the living traditions of our ancient nation to the people of America. I am sure many of you would have had an opportunity to visit the festival on the mall.

Before making my presentation on today's topic about "***Preserving Tradition and Promoting Modernity***" I would like to mention here that the year 2008 marks the historic commemoration of over 100 years of glorious benevolent rule by the Wangchuck Dynasty, the formal coronation of the 5th *Druk Gyalpo*, the transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy, and the adoption of the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan.

In light of these historic events taking place in Bhutan, the opportunity of being the focus country at the 42nd Folklife Festival was of special significance. The Festival, with its drawing of visitors from all walks of life and from all over the world, provided an excellent platform to respond to the huge international interest and curiosity that the afore mentioned events have raised.

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The festival also became a forum for Bhutan to inform the people and decision makers in the United States, and the world, about our policy issues on cultural and environmental preservation specifically with regard to the achievement of GNH.

For Bhutan, our cultural heritage has continually been an important background for weaving a network of inter-connections across the world.

Our small nation is today poised on a cultural journey inspired by many dreams, not least of which seeks to bridge the world's youngest and oldest democracies. I believe that we are at a juncture where we can embark on a pragmatic partnership based on the principles of friendship.

We must build on this opportunity. The significant event of the Festival has provided the basis for strengthening the ties between the peoples of America and Bhutan.

Although the apparent differences between the United States and Bhutan seem great, a fine and special bond connects us. The glorious ideals inscribed in the heart of America are the three tenets of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

These fundamentals, though expressed in different terms, are also very dear to our tiny nation through Gross National Happiness, which is a legacy of His Majesty the 4th King and founded on the traditional concepts of peace and happiness.

Opening Remarks

[This section provides background information on Bhutan to those who may not be familiar with the country. The section has been intentionally kept brief as most of the points brought here will be discussed in detail in the main presentation.]

I will now make a brief introduction to Bhutan for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with the country. I shall then present background information and discuss what Bhutan is doing to achieve a balance in the preservation of our traditions while promoting modernity.

I would like to devote a little more time to the 3rd and 4th pillars of GNH as than on the 1st and 2nd as that will give me an opportunity to elaborate for your benefit a little about Bhutanese culture and our heritage and the political framework.

Introduction

The Kingdom of Bhutan [Bhutan] is a democratic constitutional monarchy in South Asia.

Centuries of isolationism, a small population, topographical extremes, and strong government policy for ecological conservation have ensured Bhutan maintains an intact ecosystem.

Climatic conditions range from the monsoon rain in summer to a relatively dry winter, and varied climates depending on altitude that ranges from 100 meters in the south to 7,500 meters in the north. Bhutan has several of the highest unclimbed mountains in the world, of which the tallest is the Gangkhar Puensum, at 7541 meters.

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With habitats ranging from tropical lowlands to alpine meadows, Bhutan harbours an immense diversity of plants and animals and has been declared as one of the ten global biodiversity 'hotspots'.

Bhutan is among the top ten countries in the world in terms of species density, and is possibly has the only area where the habitat of the mythical snow leopard and mighty tiger traverse, including many rare and endangered species like the takin, red panda and golden langur.

History

With regard to our history, ancient stone implements and other archaeological findings indicate there were settlements in Bhutan dating back to 2000 B.C. but little else is known.

The recorded history of the kingdom, however, begins with the advent of Buddhism in the 8th Century. In 747 A.D. Padmasambhava, a Buddhist sage from India visited Bhutan and introduced Buddhism. Since then Buddhism has occupied a predominant role in shaping the social political, economic and cultural evolution of the country.

In the centuries that followed, lamas or Buddhist teachers and local nobility established their own separate domains throughout the country. A conscious policy of isolation complemented by geographical barriers enabled Bhutan to maintain sovereignty throughout our known history.

Bhutan, however little known to the outside world, is an ancient country that has remained independent through out its history, and this determination for sovereignty is so strong that until 1958, the country deliberately followed a policy of isolation as a means to protect our independence. While many who

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do not know us well think of Bhutan as a hidden mystical place of spiritual monks, historical antecedents show we are practical realists striving to balance our religious dogma with the ground realities of socio-political persuasions and economic necessities.

Within the specifics of historical antecedents that have also served as a precedent to contemporary geopolitics, Bhutan's desire to stress upon our individuality is rooted in the concept of our survival as a sovereign state. In dealing with the onslaught of the global imperatives that confront us, we resort to the time tested resources at our disposal, which in this case, is taking strength in our unique cultural identity to enhance the adaptability of our society to external influences.

The Bhutan 2020 Vision Statement prepared by the Royal Government states: *"The main challenge facing the nation as a whole is the maintenance of our identity, sovereignty, and security as a nation-state."* This is of special concern to Bhutan as we seek to preserve our traditions while promoting modernity. The people of Bhutan take pride that the kingdom has never been colonized, and fiercely guard that sovereignty.

Historical Backdrop

Before moving on to the recent changes that transformed the kingdom to a democratic constitutional monarchy, I would like to take a step back into history. To draw a chronological parallel that you might find closer to home, when in the early 17th century the colonies in America were in the preparatory processes of becoming a new nation that to the world would soon become the bastion of democracy, Bhutan was a conglomeration of interdependent yet often warring valley kingdoms. There was no real system

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of governance that extended beyond the domain of local valley clans and chiefs and these were each striving to establish dominance over the other.

Essentially, Bhutan prior to the 17th century, had different structures of rulers in place, such that valleys and communities of Bhutan were independent of any higher political authority. With some variation, the social patterns were similar all over the region. Against this backdrop, *Ngawang Namgyal*, the Prince Abbot of the *Drukpa* lineage established his hegemony as the *Zhabdrung*, [which is loosely translated as “at whose feet one submits”] and unified the country under his central authority.

The *Zhabdrung* asserted the total sovereignty of the small nation he had unified by establishing the imperative need of the independent evolution of socio-cultural, religious, and political systems unique to the newly formed nation of *Druk-yul*. For example, while there are other traditions in the Himalayan region that have a common source, the newly founded nation developed a unique code of etiquette called *Drig-lam Nam-zha*. This Code was based on Buddhist values and observed, both as a ritual in ceremonial occasions, and in the daily approach to life. As such, that same need to maintain the unique identity has been carried over into modern Bhutan and is found integrated into the main pillars of GNH.

In the political front, the *Zhabdrung* set up the institution of *Chhö-sid* by which secular rule and religious law were vested in the *Druk De-sid* and the *Je Khenpo*. The institution of *Je Khenpo* has survived extant to this day while that of the *De-sid* transformed, in a sense, to that of the *Druk Gyalpo*.

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Over two centuries after the *Zhabdrung*, with both internal strife and external threats of the 19th century looming large, the people of Bhutan came to a consensus that there was a need for hereditary kingship that would reign in the sovereign interest of the small nation. Thus, in 1907 the *Trongsa Penlop*, *Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck* was unanimously elected as the 1st *Druk Gyalpo*.

With the mandate of the hereditary monarchy of Bhutan coming from the people, most Bhutanese, if not all, continue to believe that the *Druk Gyalpo* emerged through divine intervention to become a unique Bhutanese system of monarchy that personified the will of the people. That is why in recent times, the people were so reluctant to accept the return of power from the throne to the people. [*I shall elaborate on this later in the presentation.*]

Over a hundred years ago, the people of Bhutan had vested in the Wangchuck dynasty the mandate to rule by which has emerged the unique kingdom that exists today. A century later that poignant moment was replayed when the 4th King formally announced that the sacred authority exercised by the *Druk Gyalpo* was granted back to the people.

The profound gesture that Bhutan witnessed when the *Druk Gyalpo* placed the ceremonial scarves on the people's elected prime minister effectively returned that responsibility to the Bhutanese people as ready to govern ourselves. The royal announcement of abdication will echo through history as future generations look back at this event, just as we look back to 1907, and we can only hope that they will have the fortune to be looking back at a glorious 100 years such as we have been blessed with.

GNH

In the hopes of providing you all with a comprehensive understanding of Bhutan, and our attempts to preserve our traditions in the face of modern challenges, I shall base the next part of this presentation loosely on GNH and its four pillars. I would like to cover the four pillars by bearing in mind the following questions which I shall then try to answer. What is Gross National Happiness? How is the philosophy pursued in Bhutan? And How will it measured.

Thus, with your permission, I shall now briefly discuss this.

Very recently, His Royal Highness, Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck, at a discussion on GNH at the Asia Society in New York had said that “*GNH underpinned Bhutan’s entire development strategy in the pursuit of harmony, contentment, and happiness for the people of Bhutan,*” and emphasized that “*...if some way of measuring happiness in numbers is the target of development economists, then it’s important that the numbers remain the servant, and not the master, of the concept.*”

“In recent years, some may feel that too much emphasis has been placed worldwide on the material aspects of development – often at the expense of the individual, ...but we in Bhutan hope that greater awareness of GNH can help redress the balance – and, if we can succeed, I believe our tiny nation can be an example to others too.” [END QUOTE]

Based on belief that happiness is the innermost desire of every human being, His Majesty the 4th King had pronounced the concept soon after his accession to the throne in 1972. In the words of His Majesty the 4th King,

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because "*happiness takes precedence over economic prosperity in our national development process*" Bhutan has chosen to follow our own path to development which seeks to balance quantifiable economic growth and material benefits with qualitative well being of the people. As His majesty had succinctly proclaimed, "*GNH is more important than GDP.*"

The present King, His Majesty the 5th Druk Gyalpo has said that even if the philosophy of GNH is inherently Bhutanese, its ideas may have a positive relevance to any nation, community or peoples. In his own words, something that GNH seeks to bring about is the "*convergence among nations on the idea of what the primary objective of development and progress should be*" and that "*There cannot be enduring peace, prosperity, equality and brotherhood in this world if our aims are so separate and divergent especially as the world shrinks to a global village.*"

To describe GNH in a few words, whereas conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective, GNH acknowledges that development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development complement and reinforce each other. Essentially, what we are seeing here is that overall well being is the ultimate goal of development efforts, so the mandate of the state is to create an enabling environment for GNH.

The international community first caught more than a passing interest in the concept of GNH at the Asia-Pacific Millennium Summit in Seoul 1998. Regionally, the concept had already gained interest with our neighbours, and the SAARC economic and planning ministers adopted the concept of GNH

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and its four pillars among the principles and strategies for the eradication of poverty in South Asia.

The four pillars of GNH are

1. Promotion of equitable and sustainable socio-economic development,
2. Preservation and promotion of cultural values,
3. Conservation of the natural environment, and
4. Establishment of good governance.

The socio-economic and the cultural pillars address two dimensions of material and spiritual development while the other two pillars provide the bases and means for all actions in the realms of the material and the spiritual

GNH is a program of social and economic change towards putting into operation the notion of national development that promotes the happiness of our people as its ultimate value. In this regard, equal importance is attached to socio-economic development and the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs. For GNH to become operational, economic growth is not an end in itself but one of the many means to achieve GNH.

1. Sustainable and equitable Socio –economic development:

This pillar represents the pursuit of material comfort, and is not different from conventional development approaches. Let me clarify here that GHN does not reject economic indicators. What GNH seeks to do is to moderate economic development in consonance with spiritual and cultural consideration. Thus, economic development is not an end in itself but is one of the many means to achieve GNH. This is evident by the fact that in

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successive development plans almost one-fourth of the Royal Government's Plan budget is allocated to the social sectors of health and education.

Considerable efforts have also been made in training and developing the capacity of the country in the professional and specialized skills that are required for the development and management of economic activities.

Thanks to the generous assistance from friendly countries and multilateral agencies, our achievements have been quite satisfactory so far. But there is so much more to do.

Life in much of rural Bhutan is still a struggle and the capacity of the state is limited against the special challenges offered by the difficult geography, dispersed population, and delicate ecology.

[This brings me to the next point.]

2. Conservation of Environment

The survival of the Bhutanese people is directly and immediately conditioned by our relation to nature. In the extremely fragile and rich diverse ecology in which we live, our approach to harmonious interdependence with our environment was guided by His Majesty the 4th King who has always been a strong advocate of environmental ethics long before the subject became fashionable.

Bhutan has an excellent environmental track record, with more than 74 per cent of its land under forest cover, and 26 per cent of this cover designated as protected areas. In recognition of Bhutan's commitment to placing the environment at the centre of our constitution and all development plans, His

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Majesty the 4th King and the people of Bhutan received the Champions of the Earth Award in its inaugural year. Further, His Majesty the 4th King was presented the J. Paul Getty Conservation Leadership Award by the World Wildlife Fund, one of the world's prestigious awards devoted to conservation.

I remember that some one had once referred to Bhutan an acupuncture point in the leviathan body of our ailing planet.

There is a National Environment Commission backed by strong laws and regulatory powers to ensure all development decisions by individuals, the Government, the private sector, and the traditional sectors, do not tip the balance between man and nature. But it is not enough that we take local or national actions. Global warming for instance has already led to visibly alarming signs of the withdrawal of glaciers, which are the sources and natural regulators of our river systems.

I would like to point out here that the grave effects of climate change make the challenges confronting Bhutan even more difficult. The irony of climate change is that its worst impacts will be on poor and developing countries such as Bhutan, who are least responsible for the problem.

Therefore, Bhutan has two major concerns from climate change.

First is the potential adverse impact on agriculture, which is the mainstay of our largely agrarian population. Second, the more serious and immediate, is the rate at which Himalayan glaciers are receding, and results in the dangerous phenomenon called Glacial lake outburst floods or (GLOF). This has already caused devastations in the past and future outbursts would be far

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worse to our fertile agrarian lands and human settlements. At present, Bhutan has about 3000 glacial lakes of which 24 have been identified to be as potentially dangerous.

As a member of the global community, Bhutan is mindful of our responsibility, and fully appreciative of the consequences of our own actions to the world. We have volunteered assurances to our neighbors downstream, share satisfaction in our contribution to global carbon sequestration, and take active part in the international forum where environment is discussed.

Let me point out here that it is very important to increase awareness in the world to recognize earth as a mortal organism that must be nourished and protected. The constant abuse and misuse of our finite natural resources are means that the seemingly magical ability of the earth to regenerate and replenish its stock is being directly impacted.

3. Presentation and Promotion of culture

This pillar, which represents the spiritual dimension of development in the broad sense of the term, is often relegated to being least important in the global agenda of economic advancement. I would, however, like to point out that the United Nations Development Programme published an excellent development report in 2004 which was specially significant for its singular focus to culture.

Some few years ago, His Majesty the 4th King had reflected that "*one way or another, change is coming,*" and that for Bhutan "*Being a small country, we do not have economic power. We do not have military muscle. We cannot play a dominant international role, because of our small size and population and because we are a landlocked country. The only factor we can fall back*

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on which can strengthen Bhutan's sovereignty and our different identity is the unique culture we have."

While culture has varied and broad definitions, what is commonly agreed to is that culture provides the moral and ethical framework within which individuals and society at large gain the means to contribute towards furthering true human development. The value of extended family finds particular mention in Bhutan's constitution, and basic human values will continue to be promoted in schools along with religious values.

Even with all the influx of modern distractions, at heart the Bhutanese are still a simple people. Religion still plays an important role in daily life and while it would be wrong to suggest that Buddhism best facilitates happiness, it is true to say that our Buddhist culture has much to do with our choice to make happiness the goal of our development process.

I guess by now you all may be a little tired of the Bhutanese tendency to place culture high on our agenda and make it visible both physically and intrinsically. Please bear with us. Please try and understand that it is our being such a small and developing country that we are mindful of the threats we face as a unique identity. Yet, we are not oblivious to the need to grow as an open society. We are well aware of the need to change and become an integral part of the global society. It is just that in doing so, we also have to ensure the choices of preserving, discarding, altering or adapting is with us.

I shall like to digress a bit here, and with a little satisfaction, let you all know that over the years the attraction of Bhutan as a cultural destination and the appreciation that visitors show for our way of life has been a source of

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support that lets us know we may be on to something here. To borrow a few words from the Prime Minister, *“It raises our self-esteem, while also giving cause to hold on to what may otherwise be lost.”*

I am truly happy to say that our participation in the Smithsonian Folklife Festival earlier this month has given us the opportunity to showcase a small glimpse of Bhutan’s cultural heritage with the people of the United States.

As long as Culture remains a driving force and consideration for development, I believe Bhutan will stay the course. Nevertheless, our challenges are many and mounting and it is this pillar that must have the deepest foundation to endure the growing burden that it must bear.

4. Good Governance

Now, moving on to the 4th pillar, the structure of this presentation has been such that I have deliberately kept political issues and good governance as the last topic. This is because in light of today’s theme and the changes in Bhutan, I will try to devote a little more time on this issue.

Under this pillar, I shall attempt to provide a historical reference, while also covering the major institutions, including the constitution, other support structures on our road to happiness, and the recent elections.

According to the new Prime Minister, *Lyonchoen Jigmi Thinley*, while *“Happiness has usually been considered a utopian issue,”* he has stressed that because the *“individual's quest for happiness, and inner and outer freedom, is the most precious endeavour, society's ideal of governance and polity should promote this endeavour.”*

Tradition and Modernity

A major question that confronts Bhutan today with the rapid changes is that of preserving our traditions while promoting modernity. In response to this we draw inspiration from the wisdom of the past to face the challenges of changing times. Thus far, Bhutan has shown a capacity to transform the effects of modernisation into something consistent with our system of values and that is not harmful to our traditions.

As such, all that we encounter is adapted to fit the framework within which we choose to operate. Subsequently, economic, political, social, and cultural disruptions are minimal. To illustrate, the process of socio-economic development came late to Bhutan, but since its advent in the 1960s has become distinctively Bhutanese.

The strategy of cautious and planned socio-economic development that the government implemented best describes the conscious effort to avoid mistakes made elsewhere by those experiencing the modern development process before us. In addition, the dependence on foreign aid and expertise that facilitated the development process was channelled carefully to prevent the erosion of national priorities.

His Majesty the 4th King had continually reminded the people that while the monarchy may have worked in the past, it was not an ideal system, and that to keep up with the changing times there was the need to establish a system that would not be dependent on one person alone chosen by birth.

The people of Bhutan had initially been apprehensive of drastic changes to the status quo, particularly to the deeply revered institution of monarchy.

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Even earlier, during the times of the present king's father and grandfather, people had vociferously refused to accept both the kings' decisions to authorise the National Assembly with the power of removal of kingship through a vote of no confidence.

Within the context of the dramatic changes initiated by the 4th King during his reign, the people had not asked for political democracy, nor did they want it. It is only their unwavering faith in the benevolence of both the 4th King and his successor the 5th King that they became convinced the changes were for the better. Once they were attuned with the broad visions of the monarchs, the whole country made a concerted effort to usher in democracy in accordance with the vision.

[Let me ask this question:]

So how is this relevant to what we are discussing today?

The principal issue here is that we are introducing modern western concepts; and these concepts are primarily in the spheres of political governance and economic development. Suffice it to say that the ramifications of these will be felt at the very roots of our traditions and our socio-cultural lives.

The aspects of having a well-trained and compact system are evident in the bureaucracy and the judiciary, and have lately been seen in the establishment of the country's' first democratically elected parliament. Primary in the building up of a strong governance structure is the emphasis on a modern system of education embellished by distinctive Bhutanese criteria.

A relevant example that comes to mind of this alteration, of making the new system cohesive with the old, is the *re-organisation* exercise carried out in

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the civil service, the judicial system, and the legislature over the past years. The traditional codes and Buddhist values have augmented the improvements of procedural norms through the development of national standards of the overall system.

The underlying thought within the minds of most, if not all Bhutanese, is that on looking back at half a century of incredible development, we will be exceptionally blessed if in the years to come we can achieve nearly as much as we already have in the past. That is why we need to look inside our system for inspiration. Even as we chart our future with democracy, we have two millennia of history to draw from.

Support Structures

Let me now dwell upon a question before I continue: What is it that has aided the progress of Bhutan?

In my mind, I think it is the benevolent leadership of our Kings. There are two thoughts I wish to share with you now: First, for over 100 years, under the five monarchs, there have been many progressive steps in the country; so changes as such are not new to the Bhutanese people. Second, Bhutan is a small nation among giant neighbours and out of necessity had, as a country, always been proactive in dealing with issues that confronted us.

The monarchy in Bhutan was always the key agent of change and the initiator of all reforms. For instance, in the 1950s, radical land reform and the use of the *Ki-du* welfare system which were instrumental policy tools for making the process of made modernisation acceptable to all circles of society.

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Granted, the more recent changes in Bhutan were initiated by the throne again, and have been the most radical. We remember though, that over the course of his reign, the 4th King had continually nurtured the idea and created awareness among the people of the need for establishing a system uniquely adapted to our situation. Further, His Majesty had always emphasised that the system should not rely on the individual, but on the concerted efforts of the people.

Of course, when the changes were actually occurring on the ground through the process of gradual decentralisation, most people did not even comprehend the enormity of his vision. Now, with the advantage of hindsight, we look back and nod with heartfelt appreciation. I feel we were fortunate that His Majesty, through an enlightened leadership he personified, prepared his subjects for the imminent changes he had envisioned. For example, in the process of decentralisation, His Majesty first introduced decentralisation through the administration, then through fiscal measures, and then through the political machinery.

The structures and institutional arrangements created by the *Zhabdrung* have also survived under the present system with modifications that are more in tune with the changing times, but the essence remains.

Also, the traditional system of consensus governance is everywhere in all aspects of development.

The *Druk Gyalpo*, confers within the tripartite involvement of the *Dra-tshang* [Religion], *Zhung* [Political], and *Mi-sey* [People] to arrive at solutions that are acceptable to all involved. For example, with the creation

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of the monarchy, representatives of the monastic order, the political bodies, and the people had signed a written contract. This contract, called a *Genja*, embodied the act of consensus that established the monarchy.

Also, that attitude for adapting well to change has been defined by the wise guidance of our Kings coupled with the traditions of dialogue between and amongst the people, and between the people and the government. It is why the people, after initial apprehensions of change in the status quo, became convinced of its necessary practicality and embraced the change before change engulfed us.

At this phase in our history, Bhutan has been blessed with the granting of opportunities for which so many elsewhere have died, where the very fabric of society had been severely damaged. The people of Bhutan have realised that all over the world, both in times past and even now, there are and have been countries that sought democracy to be the foundation on which to build the substance of peace and prosperity.

In Bhutan, that substance we so cherish had already been present, and we are only seeking to guarantee the continuity of values that Gross National Happiness enunciates. It is not a question of achieving every goal but of getting it right. Gross National Happiness is the responsibility to build the environment for people to seek happiness. Here we have the perfect opportunity to build this environment.

Road to Happiness

For Bhutan, political transformation is part of staying on the right path. In the past, the intuitive wisdom of our Kings have been our guide. For the

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future we are building the democratic institutions that will provide the vision, policies, and rule of law for secure and stable growth.

Let me say without any ambiguity, that for Bhutan, democracy is not the goal. What we in Bhutan seek is good governance, and should it be democracy that is the tool for achieving this goal, then that tool must be utilised to serve the people. There is already a growing awareness among the populace that as the politicians are coming into the communities to ask the people for their votes, therefore, it follows that by winning the election the politicians actually win the opportunity to serve the people. This common phenomenon in the minds and hearts of the people was reinforced by His Majesty declaring during the elections that the vote is a *nor-bu*.

Now, *nor-bu* does not simply mean a jewel, or a precious stone. It essentially refers to a highly intrinsic value. Here, it is the vote, comparable to a wish fulfilling jewel that the *Druk Gyalpo* granted, not to the politicians, but to the people of Bhutan so that they may chart the future of the country according to their wishes. By extension, it is the people who thus become an invaluable and constant reminder of the mandate.

It is commonly known that the histories of the world's nations and their quest for democracy has shown that democracy is not easily accomplished. That thread of commonality in human experience around the world has allowed Bhutan to carefully weave our own vision of democracy. Bhutan has the invaluable conditions of peace and stability while we build our system. These are the products of benevolent rule that manifest the vision for our journey to democracy. Thus far this vision is on track.

The Politics of Bhutan

As you may have gathered by now, the politics of Bhutan by tradition takes place within the framework of an absolute and hereditary monarchy. This still holds true even as the kingdom has recently undergone a transition to a democratic constitutional monarchy.

The King of Bhutan [*Druk Gyalpo*] is the head of state, and retains the position of the Commander-in-Chief of the army. Religious authority is vested in the *Je Khenpo*, and the newly elected Prime Minister [*Lyon-choen*] is the head of government.

Executive power is exercised by a council of ministers [*Lhen-gye Zhung-tshog*], Legislative power is vested in both the Government [*Zhung*] and the National Assembly [*Gyal-yong Tshog-de*], and the Judiciary power by the Chief Justice.

The Political System

In a sense, what we have tried to do in Bhutan is adapt the political machinations to suit our needs. His Majesty had felt that a stable and truly representative government in Parliament was best served by having a multi-party system at the primary level, and the two parties getting the maximum votes at the first stage would move on to contest the general elections to the National Assembly.

This is profound as it disallows for the tyranny of a two-party system, and the perpetuation of single party dominance is reduced. It is perhaps a unique feature of our Constitution as I am not aware of any other Constitution that discusses such a political party structure.

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An important provision is to protect local government autonomy from the manoeuvrings of political parties by ensuring all local governments get a certain percentage of the national revenue, besides other budgetary support.

Executive Branch

Now, with regard to the executive body, the Head of State is the *Druk Gyalpo* and may be removed by two thirds majority vote by the National Assembly. In 1998, at the behest of the reigning monarch, the 4th *Druk Gyalpo*, executive powers of the King was transferred to the Council of Ministers. As for this Council, the candidates were nominated by the King, but had to be elected by the National Assembly for a fixed, five-year term, and be a part of the legislative assembly. There was also a Royal Advisory Council [RAC] whose members were appointed by the monarch, but with the new system this is no longer the case.

The Prime Minister is the head of government. Before the parliamentary elections, the post of Prime Minister worked out on the basis of rotation each year between the five candidates who secured the highest number of votes in the National Assembly.

With the new system, all ministries will be headed by Ministers as political appointees, but to represent the civil service there will also be a Secretary in each of the ministries. The set-up is similar to the old structure except that the Ministers now are appointed from the party cadre and not from the bureaucracy.

Legislative Branch

With regard to the legislative arm of government, the older form of parliament was a unicameral system made up of the National Assembly. There were 150 members; of which 106 members were elected at various dates for a three year term in single-seat constituencies, while 34 members were appointed, and 10 members were representatives of the monk body.

In a sense, suffrage in Bhutan was unique as it was the family-unit, rather than individual, which had one vote. By the articles of the new Constitution, this has changed to full universal suffrage as made evident in the recent elections.

The unicameral system has now been replaced by a bicameral parliament which is the National Council (upper house) and the National Assembly (lower house). The members are generally young, many of them aged below 40. This is probably because only persons holding a university degree were allowed to contest the elections, and that access to formal education is relatively recent in Bhutan.

- **National Council**

The National Council is the upper house of Bhutan's new bicameral Parliament and consists of 25 members. 20 members were elected in the first ever elections for the Council held on December 31, 2007 and January 29, 2008. They are elected by the electorate of the 20 *Dzong-khag*.

The remaining 5 members were nominated by the *Druk Gyalpo* from eminent personages of the government. The members may not belong to any political party and must have a graduate degree to qualify.

- **National Assembly of Bhutan**

The National Assembly is the elected lower house of Bhutan's new bicameral Parliament and consists of 47 members, who were elected by the electorate of the 20 *Dzong-khag* in the first ever parliamentary elections on March 24, 2008.

Judicial Branch

In the older judicial system, the King was the final court of appeal akin to the Supreme Court of Appeal. The Royal High Court of Bhutan was the highest court with original jurisdiction over the 20 districts of the nation. The legal system was a largely informal blend that brought together traditional law and superficially based on English common law. Judicial appointments were made by the monarch, and could be recalled at his discretion.

- **Guarantee of Law**

I must not forget to briefly cover the importance of social contract as exemplified by the reverence for Law. Bhutan is now in the midst of historical changes. As we move from monarchy towards democracy, we also adopt the country's first written Constitution, and a Supreme Court is being formed.

While the modern nuances of terminology with the judiciary may be new, let me state that we already had strong judicial institutions with the principles of the separation of powers essentially enshrined in the charter of 1652. Based on this precedent set up by the *Zhabdrung*, successive rulers during the rule of *Chhö-sid*, and later by the *Druk Gyalpo*, have effectively functioned within the defined separation of powers. The change here is not so much in

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the system but rather the workings of it. The change must be in the mindset of the people, that the access for redress has been shifted from the king to the Supreme Court.

Under the doctrine of separation of powers, the judiciary had a clearly defined role to interpret the laws and not to legislate. That separation is thus not new; it is only being re-strengthened. Also, in the absence of a written Constitution, there was no issuance of writs, but the judiciary was vested with the power to grant stay orders and intervene. Thus, while judicial review was not clearly mentioned in words, this most important of judicial principles was always within the judiciary.

A new development in the judiciary that keeps it abreast with the political changes is in decisions like reprieve and pardon. Traditionally, this power was the sole domain of the *Druk Gyal-po*. On adoption of the Constitution, much of the power will be vested with the Supreme Court. The Constitution, has also fixed the number of judges to nine in the High Court – excluding the Chief Justice and five in the Supreme Court so that the government and politicians cannot manipulate the judiciary. Otherwise, there will not be too much of change through this Constitution.

[I will highlight some of the important features of the constitution.]

- **Salient features of the Constitution?**

The First Article is integral as it covers the Doctrine of Sovereignty which specifies that the sovereignty of Bhutan belongs to the people, and the Doctrine of Separation of powers whereby judicial review is explicitly mentioned. I understand that elsewhere this is more open through

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interpretation and implied rights. In Bhutan, the need was felt to clearly spell out this important feature in the Constitution itself.

The Constitution also specifies that the form of government in Bhutan is that of a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. Here again, I understand that this is a unique feature of the Constitution of Bhutan as there is no other country that specifies Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in its constitution. Of course, a Constitutional Monarchy is democratic per se, but use of the actual word Democracy, was consciously chosen in our case. This is to avoid unwarranted interpretations to the principle of democracy which could occur in the future. The actual usage of the term thus makes it clear : Democratic Constitutional Monarchy.

The most important feature under Article 2 is that conventionally, “the King never dies”, but in Bhutan the King will now have to abdicate at the age of 65. This was an unpopular provision which was strongly resisted by the people, but His Majesty himself inserted the clause as he felt it was necessary.

Also, in keeping with the age of abdication for kingship, and for constitutional posts, the tenure for judges has also been decided either 10 years of service or the age of 65, whichever comes earlier. The reason for keeping the 10 year clause is important as it is a measure against the possible appointment of a wrong judge.

The other unique feature of this Democratic Constitutional Monarchy is, that there can be a vote of confidence against the king for violation of the

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Constitution forcing him to abdicate. This goes against our popular concept that the “King can do no wrong”, but now it will change.

Another unique feature of our Constitution is the protection of the environment whereby we have said 60% of the country must have forest cover, so we can appreciate the past, enjoy the present and bequeath what we have inherited to the future.

Election Process

For your kind information, I shall now try to elaborate on the historic election process in Bhutan.

The Kingdom of Bhutan held the first general election on the 24th of March, 2008 for the National Assembly. Two parties were registered by the Election Commission of Bhutan to contest the election: the **People's Democratic Party** (PDP) and the *Druk Phuen-sum Tshog-pa* (DPT).

- The **People's Democratic Party** (PDP) became the first officially recognised political party in Bhutan on September 1, 2007 after being registered with the Election Commission. It is one of the two major political parties in Bhutan and the party had all requisite candidates in the 47 constituencies for the 2008 National Assembly election.
- The *Druk Phuen-sum Tshog-pa* (DPT), [*which in English I will translate as the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party*] became the second officially recognised political party in Bhutan on October 2, 2007 after being registered with the Election Commission. On March 24, 2008, the party won the first general election held in Bhutan. The party secured 45 of the 47 seats to the National Assembly. The DPT

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won the elections, and officially approved its leader as candidate for Prime Minister on 5th April 2008. The new Prime Minister took office on 9th April.

An interesting point with regard to the parties is that both are essentially royalists in their political approach, but the PDP is considered more modern in its outlook while the DPT is considered to be more conservative. Also, while seat representation at the Parliament is almost universal for the DPT, in the actual elections the popular vote was about two thirds majority.

Electoral system

The elections for the 47 seats of the National Assembly were planned to be held in two rounds: In the first round, voters would have voted for a party of their choice. In an effort to produce a two-party system to avoid the need for coalition governments and possible political instability, only the two parties with the largest share of the national vote would then field candidates in the 47 constituencies for the final round.

As only two parties successfully registered for the election, the election was held in one round.

Turnout reached nearly 80% by the time the polls closed, and the DPT won 45 seats, with the PDP winning only 2 seats. In terms of actual number of votes the DPT had about two thirds and PDP had one third of total votes.

Mock elections

Bhutan had been preparing for the election since 2006 with voter education and mock elections. To prepare the population of Bhutan for the change to

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democracy, 4 parties were formed to contest mock elections that were held on April 21st 2007 in all 47 constituencies.

Each party was representing certain values as their "party manifesto" and were simply called the Druk Blue Party for fairness and accountability, the Druk Green Party for the environment, the Druk Red Party for industrial development and the Druk Yellow Party for traditional values. The two parties winning the most votes proceeded to a run-off election on May 28th 2007. Election observers were also present from the United Nations and from India to observe the mock elections.

In the second round on May 28th 2007, the two leading parties, Druk Yellow Party and Druk Red Party, put up randomly chosen high school students as candidates in the 47 constituencies. The Druk Yellow Party swept the vote and won 46 of the 47 constituencies.

[Turnout in the second round was 66%. Each polling station was located, on an average, two kilometres to within two hours walk from the communities and villages and would cater to not more than 1,000 people or less than 100.

283,506 people had registered to vote, though it is considered likely that a total of 400,000 would have been eligible to register as voters.]

[If there is interest, I will explain a little more about the election process that took place in Bhutan's recent parliamentary elections. Also included is a short appendix that summarises the report of the Election Commission and the EU Observations of the historic elections.]

Election Schedule

The election procedure began with the submission of the letters of intent, lists of candidates, copies of election manifestos and audited financial statements by the two political parties contesting the elections to the election commission followed by the release of the party manifestos by them on January 22nd 2008.

All eligible voters were allowed to register with the election commission till February 20th 2008 for inclusion of their names in the voters list which was updated to include those eligible voters who turned eighteen years on January 1st 2008. The final electoral roll was published on March 5th 2008.

From January 31st to February 7th 2008, both political parties submitted the nomination papers for their candidates for the 47 constituencies. The candidates, whose nominations were accepted, started campaigning in their constituencies from February 7th to March 22nd 2008. The last date for receiving the postal ballots was February 18th 2008. The elections were held on March 24th 2008 from 09:00 a.m. to 05:00 p.m. which was then followed by the counting of ballots on the same day. The results were declared on March 25th 2008.

Mandate of the Parliament

The primary mandate of the Bhutanese parliament is to ensure that the confidence given to them is not misplaced.

This is two-fold: there is the confidence of the people who elected them, and there is the confidence of the monarchy that has voluntarily returned the power. In doing so our parliamentarians have the historic responsibility of

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establishing the right trend for future governments. Their discourse and decisions will not only reflect the standard of ethics and morality of our leadership but the value of the parliamentary system itself.

We hope that parliamentary sessions will be of the quality that has been envisioned, based on research and thinking rather than just oratory skills. This was why the election act has ensured that parliamentarians are properly qualified in terms of possessing a minimum of a university degree.

[I hope I have successfully elaborated on the 4 pillars of GNH. Before moving on to the conclusion of this presentation, I would like to briefly discuss Bhutan's attempts to quantify GNH in measurable terms.]

Measuring GNH/ GNH Indicators

While much recognition has been accorded to GNH, there has also been much criticism, and most of which is directed on the difficulty of measuring GNH in quantitative terms. What I can say is that Bhutan's determination to develop the GNH vision in concrete terms took a big step forward with the preliminary findings of rare GNH indicators.

By early 2006, the Centre for Bhutan Studies [CBS] had identified nine provisional GNH indicators that would be used in the pilot survey to measure GNH in Bhutan.

To avoid an isolated implementation of the study, and to arrive at a realistic measurement of GNH, the CBS had done extensive researching and assimilated lessons from "like-minded" organisations from as far as Canada and the UK.

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The 9 provisional indicators which were used in the survey are:

1. Standard of living,
2. Health of the population,
3. Education,
4. Ecosystem vitality and diversity,
5. Cultural vitality and diversity,
6. Time use and balance,
7. Good governance,
8. Community vitality, and
9. Emotional well being

This was a very encouraging sign as it came at a time when Bhutan was facing a most difficult challenge on the GNH policy, which is its measurement. We realize that Bhutan's GNH indicators can never measure things perfectly, but what they can do is to at least reveal the conflicts of interests and the tradeoffs.

The indicators, according to the CBS, had been developed to reflect GNH values, determine GNH policies, and track GNH progress. Therefore, the indicators would specifically guide GNH-oriented allocation of public resources, maintain GNH as a public discourse, provide baselines and yardsticks of performance of local and national bodies, and encourage pro well being behaviour among citizens.

With these GNH indicators we can measure changes and approximate the movements in the collective happiness of the Bhutanese population, which

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would then be a useful planning tool to drive, guide and evaluate the policies, decisions and performance of the government. In light of the political transition to a parliamentary democracy and the rapid economic growth, it was felt specially important that the danger would be that economic indicators could take over.

The first GNH pilot survey was then conducted by the CBS between October 2006 and January 2007. The importance of the survey was that the GNH indicators would be able to support Bhutan in its pursuit of the GNH policy and whether certain things are going in the right direction because of interventions.

According to this pilot survey, more than 68 % of the Bhutanese are very happy with their lives. The survey showed that Bhutanese people rate income, family, health, spirituality, and good governance as their most urgent requirements to be happy. Of course, a majority of 66% felt that income was the most important.

Conclusion

As I near the completion of this presentation, I hope I have clarified how Bhutan has evolved from a unique historical background, with the founding of the nation by *Zhabdrung*, through the consensual election of our hereditary monarchy, to the recent transformation into a democratic constitutional monarchy.

There have been obvious influences on institution-building and policy orientations by the factors of change. In turn, the decision-making processes have channelled the rate of change towards a manageable proportion.

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In the light of continuing challenges that have swept through Bhutan in the past century, and in facing those changes that are more recent, the country must rely on an inspiring national ideology to maintain the delicate balance between traditions and modernity.

First of all, I must, in no uncertain terms, stress that Bhutan has not achieved GNH. We make no claims to being a GNH state, but yes, we do aspire to be so. Having said that, allow me to express that Bhutan is as determined as ever to create a happy society, and our journey to Gross National Happiness has been fortified by preliminary findings of a set of GNH indicators that are expected to help develop the GNH vision.

Emergent pressures in terms of cultural preservation and socio-economic development call out for adjustments in national values to contain negative external influences and conciliate tradition with modernity. We understand that to be static is to cease, and seek to vitalize our traditions by living them as an everyday aspect of life. Yet, we are aware that unwarranted change would mean a loss of identity without which we would be helplessly engulfed by the tsunami of globalisation.

One thing has been so obvious: in earlier times Bhutan's controls on trade, tourism, and foreign investment had depended on limiting physical access. With the changes, Bhutan is facing tremendous globalizing influences that do not recognize the geographical barriers of our mountains, rivers, and forests. The inevitable surge of TV and the Internet has redefined the forms of external influences, and it is only natural that most of us Bhutanese are worried of the negative aspects of modernization and the increasing trend for the acquisition of material things.

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So, between the prescribed norms of our cultural traditions and the unavoidable impositions of modernisation, we seek a balance where the individual's pursuit of wealth and happiness does not harm the very setting that sustains him. Such a simple sentiment of an individual transposes into a greater collection of society whereby the effects in the accumulation of national wealth must not lead to an excessive use of resources.

The commitment of the 5th *Druk Gyalpo* in pursuing the vision of his father to promote even greater people's participation in the decision making process is a clear indication of the need of the day to make viable the prospect of GNH. This expression is referring to the highly original, and truly non-western Bhutanese model which can be described as a genuine exception in the mainstream of development approaches.

End Note

Before ending, I would now like to go over some personal reflections on the changes that have taken place in Bhutan.

We have learnt from the histories of the world that the deciding factor between the success and failure of a new democratic system replacing older ideologies has been the presence or absence of the right conditions. This is natural, after all, parties, politicians, and elections are very much a part of a democratic system and the misuse of these tools of governance can create a rift between good governance and actual participatory democracy.

But democracy is not about politics alone. It is about values and principles, and in its purest form is the empowerment of the people. So this becomes a collective responsibility.

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In the end, systems are only as good as the people who run them. This places the responsibility on career bureaucrats within the executive service, politicians who form the legislative body, legal professionals as interpreters of law and the constitution, and most importantly the people who hold the power of vote. It also calls for active and judicious interventions of the media and of civil society.

Bhutan's experiments with the implementation of democratic institutions, the adoption of a constitution, and the development of indices to weigh GNH are works in progress to better enable us to adapt to the tide of globalization and modernization. These tides of change could potentially upset our traditional assets of natural environment, cultural heritage, and social fabric and value systems. We believe that these changes are best addressed by achieving a balance of material growth and spiritual nourishment.

With the blessings of our benevolent and visionary monarchs, and the ready and willing support of our friends and partners, we are now securing a future where democracy will flourish, and a small developing nation like Bhutan can strive for greater prosperity.

As Bhutan evolves a system of political governance that inherits the time tested credibility of our traditions and embodies a democratic constitutional monarchy, our small but growing capacities and the readiness of our society to meet the challenges before us enable us to look with confidence at a bright future.

In the true spirit of understanding that we seek to build, I believe we have made a very good beginning. With the support and understanding of

Bhutan's friends in America, and elsewhere, the full benefits of our partnership will be realised in the months and years to come.

4th GNH Conference

For those of you who may have more than a passing interest in GNH, I would like to take this opportunity to let you know that the Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) has announced the **4th International Conference on Gross National Happiness** will be from November 7 to 9, 2008 in Bhutan.

As a follow up and building upon the previous conferences on GNH, the 4th conference will focus on themes such as psychology, environment, community relations, education, health, living standard, governance, culture, time use, and economy, and their indicators. I am confident that there will a very good international representation of distinguished individuals, including government officials, academics, and NGO representatives, at the conference. More information is available at the CBS website <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/main/index.php>.

[Those who wish to present papers should submit abstracts by end of July 2008, and the actual papers by the end of September 2008. International participants will be charged a fee of US \$ 800/- for programme participation and gratis visa will be granted to participants. Also, participants will have to make their own travel arrangement till Paro airport, from where the CBS will arrange local transport from/to airport, food, and accommodation from 6th through 9th November 2008.]

Tashi Delek

Appendix

For further details regarding the elections I have included some observations that were made by the Election Commission of Bhutan and by the EU after the historic elections had taken place.

Learning Experience

A self-assessment titled ‘Learning Experience Programme (LEP)’ was done by the Election Commission to learn from the experience of conducting elections for the first parliamentary elections. I shall go over a few points that I have noted down:

1. To improve the electoral process, Bhutan has to look into the feasibility of letting voters participate from place of residence rather than registration, the need for stringent setting on campaigns, rallies and campaign schedules, and reviewing the format and coverage of public debates.
2. Errors in the voter photo identity card (VPIC), such as date of birth, spellings of name, wrong representation of gender, and setting up a dispute settlement mechanism at the *Dzong-khag* and constituency levels in order to settle problems within the stipulated time period.
3. The issue of defining the numbers, criteria as well as the roles and responsibilities of political party workers and the need to ensure awareness of their responsibilities and a code of conduct.
4. Review of the design of the polling stations and the need for coordination with other agencies for synchronized infrastructure development in rural areas, review of the postal ballot system, including the eligible categories, details related to the various forms and process associated and the need to further clarify the

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- implementation strategy for the provisions relating to physically challenged voters are important to improve the electoral process.
5. Other important points include the continuation of voter and civic education and mainstreaming it into the school curriculum and the non-formal education programme.
 6. Further elaboration and defining the roles and responsibilities of election officials and rationing the workload. The role of *mi-dhey go-thrip* to remain apolitical and their responsibilities, such as informing people on campaign schedules, as well as voter education in the public interest were also deemed useful in improving the electoral process.
 7. Access for media agencies during the debates and counting of results were also looked into.

EU Observations

The chief observer of the European Union election observation mission (EU EOM), Mr Jose Javier Pompes Ruiz has referred to Bhutan as an “absolute democratic system” and commended Bhutan’s successful transition to democracy according to international standards.

1. At a press conference with Bhutanese media, the mission discussed aspects of its 42-point recommendation and stressed on the need for introducing “compensatory seats” in the National Assembly to offset future landslide victory such as that gained by the *Druk Phuen-sum Tshog-pa* in the March 24 elections. A certain number of additional seats could be added to the current 47 seats to bring the results closer in line with the nationwide proportional vote. This is possible since the draft constitution provides a maximum of 55 seats. ,There is a provision for majority system, which is absolutely democratic, but to

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- have better representation in the National Assembly this can be modified by introducing extra seats for the losing party without disturbing the 47 constituencies.
2. The mission also, in their final report, recommended change in the election legal framework. It stated that **election legislation to be amended** to allow for election appeals to a court during the campaign period and before the official announcement of results. They also recommended an Election Dispute Settlement Body to be established as an autonomous body within the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB).
 3. On **election administration**, the mission observed that a legal department be established within ECB to enhance its capacity to consider legal reforms and to deal with legal issues. The mission advised authorities to delink voter registration from the civil registry, allowing voters to register to vote away from their place of civil registration. They also recommended reviewing the exclusion of religious communities from the right to vote, extending the postal ballot facility to spouses of civil servants, and continuing voter education to reduce postal ballot rejection.
 4. On party registration and candidates, the EU mission recommended removing the academic qualification for candidacy to allow a broader section of the people access to public office. It stated that it was unreasonable to exclude people married to non-Bhutanese citizens from candidacy to the National Assembly and stated that other disqualifications be reviewed. The mission also recommended the revision of political party registration criteria. A pluralism of views

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among parties should be encouraged so as to offer the voters a broader political choice.

5. On the campaigns, the mission recommended the limiting of political debate of specific topics during political campaigns and stated that ECB facilitate open debate of ideas.
6. The mission noted that Bhutan had a fairly young and inexperienced media and recommended financial and technical help for the media to further develop the democratic change. They also recommended support for qualified media representatives and trainings be provided to stimulate a more lively and critical debate in the media. The mission counselled the government to consider a university degree in journalism and communication in Bhutan.
7. The Mission also advocated that elections results be officially announced only after the petition period to consider any consequences of court rulings. It stated that results reported by phone or radio should be reported as preliminary results.