

**Statement by Ambassador Daw Penjo,
Permanent Representative of Bhutan to the United Nations
at the Thematic Debate on the Millennium Development Goals**

1-2 April 2008.

Mr. President,

I would like to express my delegation's appreciation of your initiative and leadership for holding this important thematic debate. We associate ourselves with the statements made by the Chairs of Group of 77 & China, LDCs, and LLDCs.

In 2000 our leaders agreed on the Millennium Declaration, which outlined eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to benefit all people by reducing poverty and improving the livelihood of nearly one sixth of humanity by 2015. At mid-point to the target date many of these goals are far from being met. This calls for an urgent and concerted action by the international community to meet, in their entirety, the commitments made in the 2000 Declaration.

Mr. President,

I take this opportunity to inform you that Bhutan successfully held its first parliamentary elections last week. Almost 80 percent of registered voters cast their ballot to bring Bhutan into the fold of the democratic nations of the world. Formation of the new parliament and the subsequent adoption of our first

written constitution will affirm Bhutan's transition into a democratic, constitutional monarchy.

Mr. President,

Bhutan is fully committed towards achieving the MDGs, and the Royal Government has been making concerted efforts to alleviate poverty through improved access to roads, health, education, electricity, and micro financing services. Further, the Tenth Five Year Plan that begins this year is primarily focused on poverty alleviation.

While we are on track to achieve most of the MDGs, there are a few goals that need immediate attention such as achieving gender parity at the tertiary level, bringing down the rising unemployment rate, particularly among the youth, and the risks of HIV/AIDS.

Further, the grave effects of climate change will make the task of meeting the MDGs more difficult. The irony of climate change is that its worst impacts will be on the developing world, particularly small landlocked countries and island developing countries which are least responsible for the problem. In this regard, Bhutan has two major concerns from climate change. First is the adverse impact on agriculture which is the mainstay of 79% of the population. Second is the threat of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods [GLOFs] that have severe consequences

to our fertile agrarian land and human settlements. Further, any instances of GLOFs could devastate our hydropower facilities and undermine the power sector which remains Bhutan's largest source of revenue.

Urgent steps are needed to help the poorest countries adopt climate change strategies that reduce the vulnerability of their populations and improve their adaptive capacity.

Bhutan continues to face the demographic constraint of a small population that subsists on a fragile eco-system within the physical constraints of being mountainous and landlocked. The challenges are particularly acute in the delivery of social services, enhancing agricultural productivity, and the development of a dynamic private sector. Extensive capital investments in rural and urban infrastructure, and intensive capacity building at various levels, are required to ensure a smooth transition to a self-reliant economy.

Mr. President,

With support of the United Nations, the Gross National Happiness Commission published the Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment and Costing Report, 2007. This report gives a detailed assessment of financial, human, and institutional resource needs and policy reforms required by Bhutan for meeting the MDGs.

While Bhutan is on track to achieving the MDGs, resource scarcity continues to pose a challenge in fully realizing these goals. Bhutan will need to invest around USD 2.5 billion between 2006 and 2015 to successfully implement the interventions identified by the Thematic Task Forces for achieving the MDGs.

Mr. President,

Bhutan's guiding philosophy remains Gross National Happiness and all our development efforts will continue to be people centered, which includes attainment and fulfillment of our commitments in achieving the MDGs. With Bhutan's first steps in people's self rule, it is extremely important that the first democratically elected government of the people succeed in all spheres of social, political, and economic life as a clear and ready signal that the legacy of more than a hundred years of peace and prosperity is now in good hands.

We thank our development partners for their invaluable assistance towards achieving the MDGs and have full confidence in their continued support at this important juncture in our history.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.