

Ladies and Gentlemen, my Dear Friends;

It is no less of an honour and as much of a pleasure to have been invited to enjoy your warm welcome to this beautiful city of El Paso, and speak to the distinguished guests/participants on the occasion of the faculty development workshop on "Himalayan Cultures and Societies" offered by the University of Texas at El Paso College of Liberal Arts and the Asian Studies Development Program of the East-West Center and University of Hawaii.

I thank President Diana Natalicio, first for the dedication you have shown to enhance the knowledge of our friends in America so they might better understand us, and secondly for the various personal initiatives you have undertaken in making strong the ties between UTEP and Bhutan. Of note is the Memorandum of Understanding on the exchange of students and faculty between UTEP and Bhutan that will be of immense mutual benefit to both parties. Against that background, your personal resolve at bringing together in peaceful friendship the big great state of Texas with a small Buddhist kingdom halfway around the world takes particular significance within today's global imperatives.

The events lined out at UTEP have a special significance because this summer, the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival, which as you all may know is the largest annual cultural event in Washington D.C. has chosen to honour both the country of Bhutan and the State of Texas. Here, I am pleased that UTEP will play an important role in being the bridge between Texas and Bhutan.

I would also like to express deep appreciation for this momentous event from April 10-12, 2008 which UTEP with the extended support of an esteemed gallery of institutions will address Himalayan cultures. I understand that throughout the event, several sessions will include presentations on the history, culture, religion, and the interplay of environment, culture and development in the Himalayan region; the elaboration of which over the next few days will significantly

contribute to the strengthening of relations between Texas and the Himalayan region. I wish to acknowledge here the excellent work done by the directors, board members, and members of the extended family of UTEP who must have spent endless hours perfecting every last bit of work related to the organization of this monumental event at UTEP. I also take this opportunity to thank the sponsors for their generosity in making this event possible.

The event is a strong encouragement to all of us peoples nestled in the folds of the mighty Himalayas, and to all of you who have come to partake in this journey, your presence here attests to UTEPs commitment to its chosen path that will surely lead to peace, respect for international diversity, and cooperation between variegated cultures.

As you may all know, UTEP has had a strong link with Bhutan that is forged in its very foundations. The university's campus, originally inspired by traditional Bhutanese architectural style, has since been maintained and expanded with excellent results. I take here the honour in borrowing a quote from Her Majesty the Dowager Queen Ashi Kesang Choden Wangchuck who on seeing photographs mailed to her by the UTEP News Bureau in 1967 commented how [and I quote] "...thrilling and deeply moving to see a great university in faraway America inspired by Bhutanese architecture...most similar to our Bhutanese dzongs and have the same shaped roofs and strong, simple lines...beautiful, combining modern design so harmoniously with ancient Bhutanese architecture." [End quote].

As a personal testimony to that sentiment, let me say that on every visit here I succumb to a calming nostalgia that comes with the sight of your magnificent buildings defined by high inset windows in walls towering at a familiar slant. I must say that the mandala like mosaic tiles convey a sense of cohesive entirety that surely inspires all who walk on these hallowed grounds of education, be they here in passing or to set up residence. I have been told many times, by my daughter who

studies here and by alumni who now hold key positions in the private and public sectors of Bhutan that the UTEP campus always remind them of home. I am sure the other students from Bhutan currently studying here will share that feeling. Incidentally, UTEP today has 9 Bhutanese students, and if I am not mistaken, this is a record of sorts. It is the largest number ever that there have been as many students from Bhutan at one time in one American University. If past achievements are anything to go by, we can all be rest assured that the skills and experiences these young Bhutanese have reaped at UTEP will stand them in their stead, and like those who came before them, they too shall return to Bhutan and play major roles in Bhutan's social, economic, and political development.

Before I take up too much time, let me applaud Kate Bonansingan for her inspired efforts in putting together the exhibition "In the Weave" that present the textiles of Bhutan which are considered a living art and form the fabric around which is woven our sense of national identity as a unique and sovereign kingdom between our two powerful neighbours, China and India,

In conclusion, I strongly believe that we are on the right track to strengthen the peaceful and cooperative relation between the esteemed UTEP and Bhutan. I wish all the participants a fruitful and successful workshop, and look forward to interacting with you all over the course of the week.

Tashi Delek.