

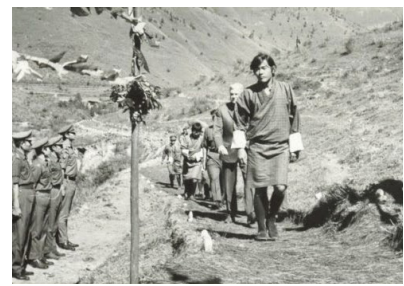
CHIDREL TAWAA 2022

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Royal Government of Bhutan**



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"We should focus on creating prosperity for our people and nation in a sustainable manner. A prosperity that is underpinned by good governance, smart policies and strategies, driven by innovation, creativity and enterprise, supported by a culture of hard work and determination. We can also derive enduring prosperity by better understanding and utilising our sovereign prerogatives. We can achieve generational prosperity by supporting our people as they develop their capabilities and realize their potential. We must reinvigorate the efforts made by successive governments on these fronts."

-His Majesty The King's Address To The Nation, 17 December 2021.

FOREWORD



Dr. Tandi Dorji
Foreign Minister

As always, it is a pleasure to bring forth a compilation of stories, experiences, and articles related to the Ministry and its undertakings in the form of the Chidrel Tawaa. It is the third year of its publication, and we believe that Chidrel Tawaa will continue to remain relevant and topical, providing a platform for our officials and friends to share their thoughts and experiences, thereby serving as a useful repository.

The third publication comes out at a time when Bhutan is observing a year-long celebration of 50 years of Bhutan's membership to the United Nations, and it is along this theme this year's edition revolves around. Going through the articles in the subsequent pages, one will witness how far Bhutan has traveled, having joined the UN on 21st September 1971 under the visionary leadership and strategic guidance of our benevolent Monarchs. The United Nations and UN Systems have always remained a strong development partner of Bhutan, and we will continue to work closely with all our partners along this shared journey.

The country now is on the cusp of a new era with a series of policy and structural reforms taking place, with every effort channeled towards economic recovery from the pandemic and smooth transition from the LDC category in 2023. Under the compassionate and able leadership of His Majesty The King, we remain assured that Bhutan will progress towards a stronger, more resilient and self-sufficient economy.

COVID-19 pandemic taught an important lesson to the world at large. For Bhutan, besides learning to live with the new normal, it gave us an opportunity to assess our vulnerabilities, and relook at policies, mechanisms and structures in taking upon modern challenges to pose ourselves for a better future for our people and country. With the country now undergoing a transformative phase from making public service institutions more efficient and effective, to strengthening and diversifying the economy, we are confident that it will help us to sustain the development progress in the post LDC graduation stage, as well as enable us to achieve tangible results as we pursue our goals of a developed Bhutan.

Lastly, I hope all will enjoy the stories and experiences shared by our contributors, and wish you a happy reading.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tandi Dorji'. The signature is stylized and written over a horizontal line.

(Dr. Tandi Dorji)
Foreign Minister

EXCERPTS OF THE STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY
DR. LOTAY TSHERING, PRIME MINISTER OF THE
KINGDOM OF BHUTAN AT THE 76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED
NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GENERAL DEBATE)

25 September 2021, New York



“I thank everyone at the organization and all the members for enriching Bhutan’s five decades of journey with the UN. We have come a long way. The fact that we are ready to graduate from the LDC category is a clear indication that our efforts together have borne results. In addition to the UN and other partners, I thank the Government of India for your unconditional support all these years. We will continue to work closely with all our partners. Please allow me to talk a little more on the last five decades.

During the 50 years, the global poverty rate dropped from 52 to 9 percent. Life expectancy increased from 57 to almost 73 years. Bhutan’s was just 40 when we joined the UN. The infant mortality rate decreased from 98 to 27 deaths per 1000 live births. Similarly, the maternal mortality reduced from almost 400 to 200 deaths per 100,000 live births. The global literacy rate spiked from 67 to 86 percent. Without the coordinated global efforts through the UN, these

progresses would not have been possible or worse, many nations could have slipped backwards. We are thankful that Bhutan has comparatively benefitted more. In the last 50 years, Bhutan was blessed with three successive monarchs. It was His Late Majesty the Third King who worked tirelessly to install Bhutan into the UN. It was a historic move to establish global diplomacy and harness meaningful friendship. The farsighted monarch led the country on the path of



modernization, with focus on modern education and progressive techniques in all spheres.

When the Fourth King took over soon after, he came with the profound development philosophy of Gross National Happiness in as early as 1972. As the term “GNH” became more pronounced over the years, the world appreciated its relevance in the sustainable and holistic format as opposed to the conventional GDP growth. I am happy to see this concept reflected in the Secretary General’s “Our Common Agenda” report, which I would like to touch upon later.”

“Despite being a small developing nation, as a GNH country, we always believe in global peace and harmony. Bhutan joined the peacekeeping fraternity in 2014. Since then, our involvement with UN Peacekeeping has grown. We are now set to deploy a Bhutanese Quick Reaction Force for the first time this year. I thank the UN for trusting us. I am confident that our troops will live up to His Majesty’s aspirations of serving with distinction and honour. In conclusion, we all know that COVID-19 will leave behind a different world. But what sort of a world we want lies in our hands. Mr. Secretary General’s report

titled “Our Common Agenda” offers all of us a good reference point for our collective progress.

For this, I thank the Secretary General for coming out with this comprehensive and bold report for a greener and safer world. Please know that Bhutan is committed to working with other Member States in advancing the ideas in the report. We have full confidence in your leadership to spearhead “Our Common Agenda.”

50 YEARS OF UN-BHUTAN PARTNERSHIP



His Majesty The King conferred the Druk Thuksey (Heart Son of Bhutan) medal to the United Nations (UN) Bhutan in recognition of their exceptional service to the nation on the occasion of 114th National Day.



Mr. Gerald Daly
Former Resident Coordinator of United Nations in Bhutan

Last year, we marked Bhutan's 50th year as a member of the United Nations during extraordinary times—both around the world as well as within Bhutan. Looking back, we are recognizing the history of a unique development journey undertaken by Bhutan under the wise and dynamic leadership of Their Majesties the Kings—the Third, Fourth and Fifth Druk Gyalpos.

We are also reminded of the strong and enduring partnership between

the UN and the Royal Government of Bhutan and today, as always, we (the UN) are committed to work together with the Royal Government and people of Bhutan for a healthier and more sustainable Bhutan.

As Bhutan commemorates an important milestone, we share our hopes, learn from our experiences and spark ideas for building the future. We strive to ensure the UN remains 'fit for purpose.' We need to expand our ambition for this

country and for the people of Bhutan and take real action to support the most vulnerable sections of the society—because only then can we truly ensure we 'leave no one behind.' In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for those furthest behind. The UN supported the very foundations of a modern Bhutan, supporting the Royal Government with the establishment of the first airline and environmental trust fund and the UN continues this work today.

The UN Secretary-General, has identified the 'five horsemen in our midst' capable of jeopardizing every aspect of humanity's future. These five horsemen include surging global tensions; a green planet that is burning; international mistrust is deep and growing; and the dark side of digital technology raises deep concern by spreading disinformation while undermining governance. In the first half of 2020, we were also beset by COVID-19 which is probably the biggest challenge to our humanity since the second World War—the impacts of which have affected humanity in ways comparable to the suffering caused by the Second World War.

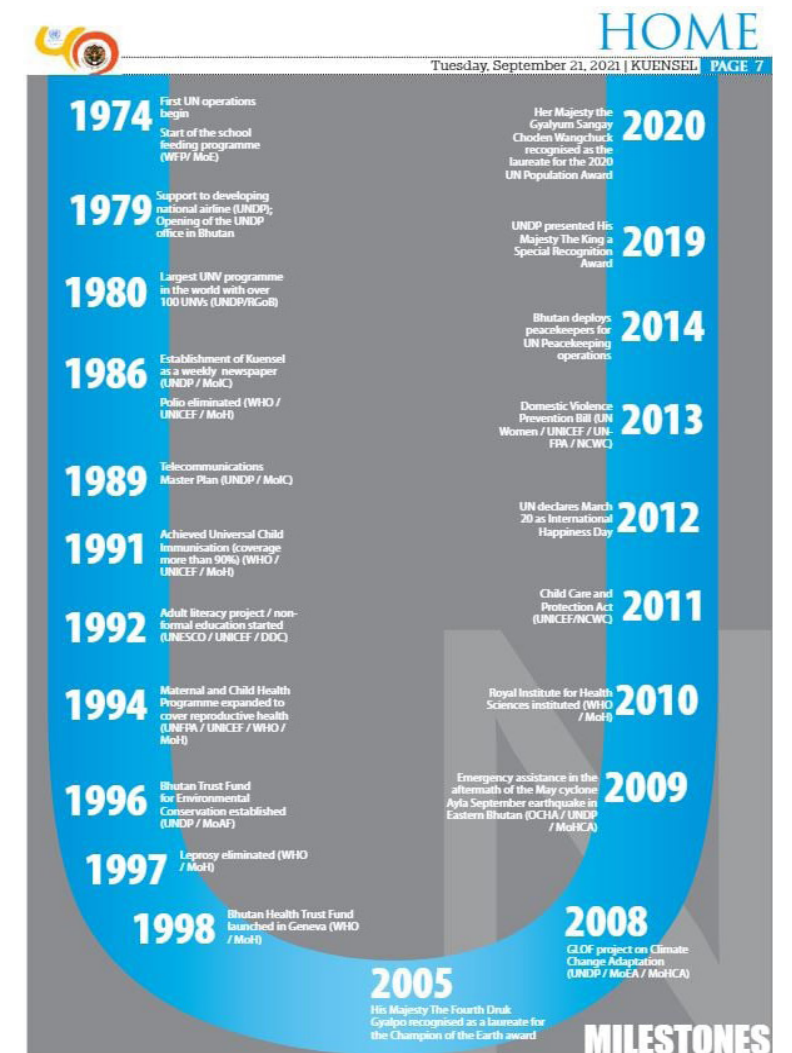
The UN supports the Royal Government in identifying the best practices in innovative financing to recover from the double crisis of both COVID-19 and climate change. The UN recognizes there is an increasing need for more resources to meet sustainable development priorities, counter the threats posed by climate change,

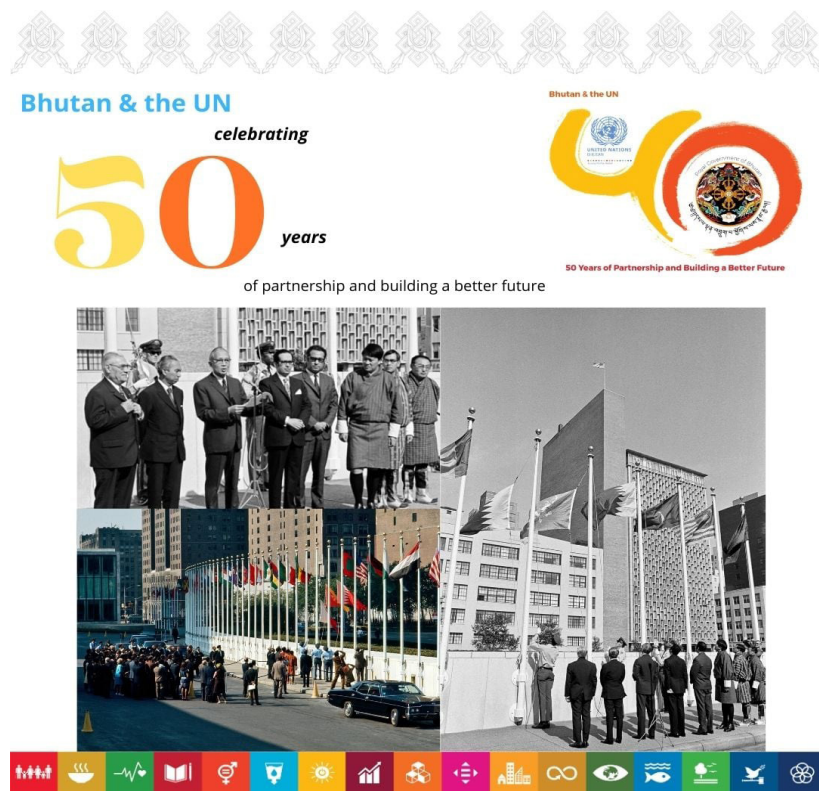
and deal with the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The issuance of Bhutan's first sovereign bond in 2020 is evidence of the contribution the UN System can make, in working together with a member state and providing technical assistance in strengthening its capital market.

As we deal with a double crisis here in Bhutan there are countries in the world (even in the region) facing what we may call a triple crisis as they are affected by conflict and violence. Bhutan plays an important role in UN Peacekeeping and police missions since it joined the frater-

nity of troop and police contributing countries in 2014. Today, 32 Bhutanese personnel serve to maintain international peace and security. This is a testament to Bhutan's commitment to share the burden along with other member states.

Bhutan has emerged as a beacon of hope in the region and the world as it responds to both climate change and COVID-19. This double crisis demonstrates the need for multilateralism and the value of a 50 year partnership. Just as the battle against COVID-19 cannot be won in isolation, so the climate crisis





requires states to come together through international cooperation. Sharing of resources and expertise between member states of the UN is needed now more than ever.

Speaking at the 75th UN General Assembly in October 2020, Prime Minister Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering said Bhutan remains assured that the United Nations is and will continue to be instrumental in spearheading global collective action for building a better world and it is time to start a new UN chapter with renewed commitment to working together at all times.

Today's UN must be ready to handle tomorrow's challenges. We must ensure that the UN is fit for purpose to meet the challenges of a new era.

While there are more countries, more people and more challenges there are also more solutions. Our working methods need to adapt, and we need to create a more agile, effective and accountable organization that delivers results-based solutions to global challenges. It is not enough to say we are part of the solution; our responsibility is to deliver results in the actions we take, day in – day out.

As the world struggles through this difficult time, I am, as always, deeply moved by how Bhutan has come together in solidarity. His Majesty The King's leadership has inspired and encouraged all Bhutanese to work together. I wish to commend the Royal Government of Bhutan for its tireless work in managing both the immediate re-

sponses to this pandemic and also the longer-term recovery measures.

On behalf of the 31 UN agencies working in Bhutan, I rededicate our commitment to the Royal Government and to the people of Bhutan. In turn, your unwavering commitment to Bhutan's development—in line with the values of Gross National Happiness—will help ensure the UN remains ever 'fit for purpose'.

The Druk Thuksey award to the UN for its service to the nation serves as an inspiration for the UN to work harder, going forward for Bhutan.

The UN is also most grateful to His Majesty The King for gifting the Tsendrong—the UN Garden to mark Bhutan's 50th anniversary as a member to the UN, most especially because it signifies the depth of agreement at the level of values of a great country and an international organization that ever strives to deliver on the values inherent in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Together, we listen; and together, we act in partnership.

COMMEMORATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF BHUTAN'S MEMBERSHIP TO THE UNITED NATIONS



Dechen Pelmo

Dy. Chief of Division
Department of Multilateral Affairs

It was a proud moment for Bhutan when the United Nations formally admitted the country as its 128th member state at the UN Headquarters in New York on 21st September 1971. Bhutan's membership to the United Nations was a significant milestone as it reinforced Bhutan's status as a sovereign nation and provided a global platform to proactively engage and contribute as a sovereign equal in the multilateral fora. The historic occasion was marked with three days of celebrations in the national capital, Thimphu.

In honour of the 50th anniversary of Bhutan's UN Membership and the strong enduring partnership between the Royal Government and the UN, a year-long celebration was held under the stewardship of the joint RGOB-UN National Commemorative Task Force. The COVID-19 pandemic restricted the size and scope of the celebrations but in no way dampened the spirit of the celebrations.

LAUNCH OF THE COMMEMORATION, 22 February 2021

The commemoration was officially launched by His Excellency Prime Minister Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering on 22 February 2021 coinciding with the 41st Birth Anniversary of His Majesty The King. The launch ceremony began with the offering of prayers

and butter lamps at the Memorial Chorten in Thimphu in honour of His Majesty The Third Druk Gyalpo. Bhutan's membership to the UN was realised mainly due to the wisdom and singular drive of His Late Majesty The Third Druk Gyalpo, during whose reign Bhutan's modern socio-economic development journey began. The official logo, the national essay competition for youth and the UN-Bhutan Joint Programme on SDG Fund were launched at the event.



LIGHTING OF THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL CHORTEN, 2 May 2021

To commemorate the 50th Anniversary, the national Memorial Chorten was illuminated in blue on the auspicious occasion of the Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo on 2 May 2021.



PLANTING OF 50 TREES, 2 June 2021

Coinciding with the Social Forestry Day, the RGoB-UN joint National Task Force organized the planting of 50 saplings to commemorate the 50th Anniversary. Social Forestry Day is celebrated on June 2 each year to mark the coronation of His Majesty The Fourth Druk Gyalpo under whose farsighted and enlightened leadership, Bhutan managed to safeguard and conserve its environment. A variety of species were planted on the ridge of Samazingkha which is a degraded area being restored by the Ministry of Agriculture & Forests. The plantation was carried out by representatives from the Royal Government and UN agencies in Bhutan.



HOISTING OF 50 PRAYER FLAGS, 22 July 2022

A special program was organised to hoist 50 prayer flags at the Kuensel Phodrang on 22 July 2021 to mark 50 years of Bhutan's membership to the United Nations and for the well being of all sentient beings. Foreign Minister Lyonpo Dr. Tandi Dorji and Mr. Gerald Daly, UN Resident Coordinator graced the occasion as Chief Guests. Following the consecration ceremony, attendees offered prayers and butter lamps in the temple housed within the Buddha Dordenma statue.



RECEPTION BY H.E. LYONCHHEN DR. LOTAY TSHERING, THE HON'BLE PRIME MINISTER, 21 September 2021

H.E. Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bhutan hosted a reception on 21st September 2021, coinciding with the day Bhutan was formally admitted as the 128th member of the United Nations 50 years ago in 1971. The reception marked the culmination of the year-long commemoration of the historic milestone of the 50th anniversary of Bhutan's membership to the United Nations. A commemorative stamp and a coffee table book were released at the event.

The 8 winners of the national youth essay competition were also formally recognised during the reception. The nationwide essay competition was launched in February 2021, under the theme of "50 years of partnership: Bhutan and the UN for a better future".

A documentary chronicling Bhutan's journey with the UN was screened for the first time at the reception. The documentary was subsequently aired on BBS Television.



SPECIAL RELEASES: COMMEMORATIVE STAMP & COFFEE TABLE BOOK, 21 September 2021

A limited edition collectible commemorative stamp developed in partnership with Bhutan Post to mark the 50th anniversary of Bhutan's membership to the UN was launched during the reception. A Coffee Table Book titled "Reflections and Beyond-50 years of Bhutan and the UN" was also launched. The book with a foreword by His Royal Highness Paro Penlop Prince Namgyel Wangchuck, who led the Royal Government's first delegation to the UN in 1971, contains a

large collection of photographs and written contributions from notable individuals who have played a role in shaping Bhutan's journey with the UN.



1000 BUTTER LAMPS AT SEMTOKHA DZONG, 24 October 2021

Bhutan observed the 76th Anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations on 24 October 2021 with prayers and the lighting of a thousand butter lamps at the Semtokha Dzong. UN Day marks the day on which the UN Charter entered into force in 1945.



SPECIAL EDITION OF KUENSEL, 21 September 2021

The 21 September 2021 edition of the national newspaper, Kuensel was dedicated to the 50th anniversary of Bhutan's UN Membership, and featured a special coverage of this milestone.



Board examinations postponed to February 2022

Thromdes or dzongkhags to decide home exams dates for affected schools

Yongchen Chozin
The education ministry has postponed the board examination to February next year. The ministry issued a notification yesterday stating that the Board of Secondary Education (BSE) will hold the main examinations from February 14 to 28 next year. The practical examination, including the practical test for the science, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students, will be held on February 12. The BSE will now prepare the examination and logistics for the evaluation. It is noted that the ministry proposed to postpone the examination so that students of Phuntsoling and Samtse, whose studies were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, would get enough time to complete the lesson and prepare for the examination. The affected schools are Phuntsoling Secondary School (MSS) in Chhokha, class IX and XI of Phuntsoling school in Phaktang, and two private schools in Phuntsoling.

Global:
Confirmed Cases: 238,183,347
Deaths: 4,685,837
India: 33,448,163
West Bengal: 1,561,649
Delhi: 1,458,867
Assam: 597,968
Arunachal Pradesh: 54,070
Sikkim: 30,955
Bangladesh: 1,541,300
Thailand: 1,662,901
Nepal: 78,239
Singapore: 77,804



GROUNDBREAKING OF UN PARK, 3 November 2021

His Majesty The King gifted the Tsendrong UN Garden to mark the 50th Anniversary of Bhutan's Membership to the UN. The Tsendrong-UN Garden located in Kawajangsa, Thimphu will be developed as a green recreational space and will form part of a larger network of parks, green spaces and gardens in the capital. The Salang Tendrel (ground-breaking) ceremony for the Tsendrong UN Garden that was held on the 3 November 2021 was graced by the Honorable Prime Minister Lyonchhen Dr. Lotay Tshering.



GLIMPSES INTO BHUTAN'S RELATIONS WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD DURING THE REIGN OF KING JIGME SINGYE WANGCHUCK



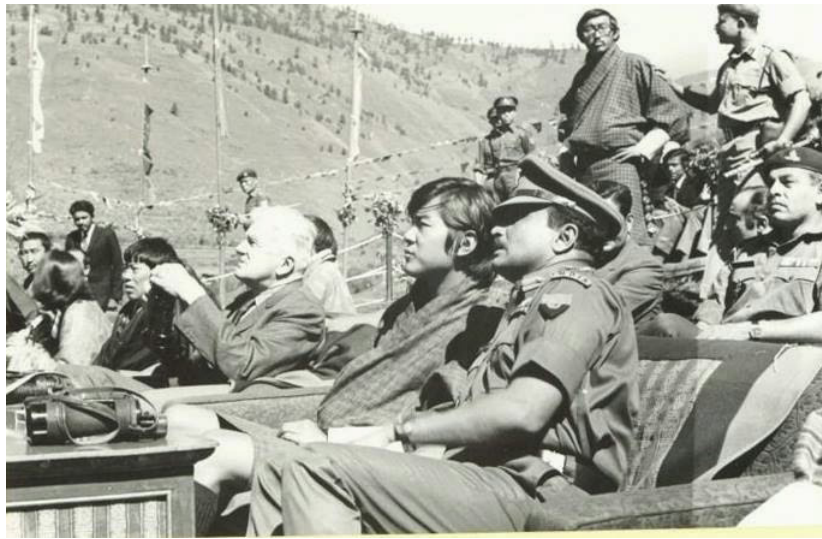
Lyonpo Om Pradhan

Circumstances determining Bhutan's foreign relations and diplomacy

The evolving national state of affairs of Bhutan, its geographic location, and the political, economic, and religious circumstances in the neighborhood are what have determined the kingdom's foreign relations.

In our external dealings, Bhutan has primarily relied on the sagacity with which successive leaders of the country have used their diplomatic acumen to confront challenges and achieve significant successes in safeguarding the country's sovereignty and independence.

Bhutan faced great challenges to



its sovereignty and independence even in recent history during the rule of His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck from 1972 to 2006. His Majesty effectively dealt with evolving international situations, tackled the dire threats to the nation's security, and at the same time, brought about increasing economic well being for his people.

Bhutan's foreign relations and diplomacy as of 1972 – the year King Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended the Golden Throne

With the signing of “The Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship” between India and Bhutan in 1949, Bhutan had gradually strengthened its ties with the independent India. By then, the centuries-old contacts with Chinese Tibet in the north had diminished.

Following the visit of the third Druk Gyalpo King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck to India in 1954, and the return visit of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to Bhutan in 1958, and the subsequent friendship and interaction between the leaders played an important role in giving direction to the kingdom's

foreign relations and diplomacy.

The membership of Bhutan to the United Nations in September 1971 emphasized the kingdom's sovereign status in the comity of nations. However, the first international membership of Bhutan was to the Colombo Plan in 1962, followed by the Universal Postal Union in 1969. As of 1972, except for diplomatic relations with India and Bangladesh, Bhutan did not have formal diplomatic ties with any other country. With the membership of the Colombo Plan, the country started obtaining economic aid and technical assistance from Japan, Australia, Austria and New Zealand, which only further expanded with the membership to the UN. Major constraints for the country were manpower and finances for international activities. Bhutan barely earned any convertible currencies as of 1972. Its diplomatic service was at a nascent stage. Such constraints posed a great challenge for the King to assert Bhutan's role as a sovereign member of the United Nations on an equal footing with other countries.

While the Bhutanese and the people in the bordering Indian States

of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bengal and Sikkim have enjoyed close bond of friendship and affinity since ancient times, this good relationship was tested when the Bodo and Assamese people launched agitations against their central government to gain what they considered a more advantageous political status. Over the years, these groups started seeking hideouts in Bhutan's thick uninhabited forests along the southern borders. This was a grave concern for Bhutan as it violated Bhutan's sovereign territory by outside forces. This contradicted the principles of peaceful coexistence upheld by both the UN and the NAM. More importantly, activities were being conducted from Bhutanese territory against a friendly neighboring country, which could adversely impact the good relations with India.

In the first years of the twenty-first century the Fourth King faced a military, political and diplomatic challenge that the country had not seen since the Duar War of 1864-1865 with British India.

The Fourth Druk Gyalpo rises to the occasion to address Bhutan's security, foreign relations and diplomacy

Relations with India

The Indian subcontinent is geographically the most convenient direction for Bhutanese trade and transit because of a number of easily negotiable land routes, and most importantly, access to and from the sea. The subcontinent has a huge ready market for Bhutanese agricultural, mineral and industrial products. On the other hand, India and

its neighbors produce the goods that Bhutanese consumers need. Thus, India has become the prominent player in Bhutan's economy.

India today is the largest financier of Bhutan's development plans and programs and the biggest trading partner. Since the initial 1972 trade agreement, trade and transit issues have been reviewed periodically. India is a major player in the construction of large hydro-power projects, and it is the sole consumer of the surplus electricity generated by the kingdom. Increasingly, Indian direct investments in businesses are being made in banks, hotels, imports and exports, medical services and education. From a religious point, too, Bhutanese pilgrims go in droves to the most important Buddhist sites in the south Asian region.

In the area of security and defense, His Majesty took up the challenge to confront and close down the camps of groups that had sneaked into the mostly uninhabited forests and hills of southern Bhutan. However, in the true fashion of a Buddhist king, His Majesty's approach was one of compassion in dealing with these elements, and closing down the hideouts. His Majesty's peaceful approach helped enhance the goodwill between the Bhutanese and the Assamese people, enabling the two sides to continue their age-old relationship. The trust and confidence between the leaders of the two countries, led the two sides to review the nature of their relations based on the 1949 treaty, provisions of which had become outdated with time. The concerned efforts of His Majesty eventually led to the signing of the “India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty” of 2007.

Relations with China

His Majesty naturally attached importance to peaceful and friendly relations with the People's Republic of China. In 1984, His Majesty decided to begin negotiations with China to demarcate the border between the two countries. This was to promote mutual goodwill and peaceful relationships.

At the United Nations, Bhutan supported and voted in favor of the People's Republic of China in 1971 to take up China's seat. Moreover, during the Coronation of His Majesty in 1974, Bhutan invited the Chinese ambassador to India to attend the ceremonies.

China demonstrated its approach towards Bhutan by entering into an agreement titled “Bhutan-China Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquility along the Sino-Bhutanese Border Areas, 1998,” which was premised on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence.

Relations with South Asian and other countries

With the establishment of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, Bhutan's dimensions in its foreign relations and diplomacy expanded in the region. The Fourth King is a founding member of SAARC.

Bhutan has established diplomatic relations with all SAARC member states. This has helped Bhutan in conducting bilateral relations on issues like trade, investments, tourism and cultural exchanges with countries in the region.

Other countries like Japan, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark, the

Netherlands and Canada promote and sustain their relations with Bhutan through technical and economic cooperation in various ways. Engagements are mainly in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism, environment, education and communications.

Multilateral diplomacy

On the multilateral front, soon after His Majesty ascended the throne, the King's diplomacy gave a novel direction to Bhutan's international relations by joining the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) in 1973. The organization had been established by leaders of countries that had emerged from being colonies of western powers. Their main objective was to remain neutral in Cold War politics, and not align themselves with any power blocs. Though NAM is said to be losing its relevance, member nations still find its principles to be relevant while conducting international relations.

During the rule of the fourth Druk Gyalpo (1972-2006), Bhutan became a member of nearly 54 UN and other multilateral organizations. Out of these, the country joined 48 of them during the Fourth Druk Gyalpo's rule. In addition, Bhutan became a member of 21 International Sports Organizations. This “multilateral diplomacy” considerably enhanced Bhutanese engagements with the rest of the world. It exposed the Bhutanese to a wide range of knowledge, skills, as well as support for the kingdom's own expanding development and international participation.



Impact of Gross National Happiness on International Relations and Diplomacy

In conducting its diplomacy, Bhutan gained considerable international prominence through Bhutan's development paradigm of Gross National Happiness (GNH). His Majesty promulgated this development approach soon after he ascended the Throne. It is this philosophy that has guided Bhutanese socio-economic development. In its basic interpretation, GNH is development that takes into account the total welfare and wellbeing of the people, and the natural environment. The concept of GNH has drawn worldwide interest as a new way to look at human development. Several international conferences with Bhutan in the lead have taken place. The United Nations adopted the now-famous 2011 "happiness" resolution.

Bhutan has been spearheading the "happiness" discussions at the United Nations, where all aspects of GNH are receiving attention to see how they can be adapted to development around the world. In 2012, the UN proclaimed March 20th as the International Day of Happiness.

Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, Druk-yul, the land of the Thunder Dragon, has spread out its wings to cover the globe, and its roar echoes frequently around the world. The Bhutanese people and the international community owe much to the vision and farsightedness of King Jigme Singye Wangchuck in promoting peace and prosperity.

BHUTAN'S LDC GRADUATION



Mr. Gembo Tshering

Dy. Chief of Division
Department of Multilateral Affairs

Concept of Least Developed Countries

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are a category of developing countries confronted with severe structural impediments to socio-economic development and are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets. This concept of LDCs originated in the late 1960s and the United Nations listed the first group of LDCs in 1971.

More than 50 years since LDC club was first pronounced, many countries in the LDC category still face the risk of deeper poverty and underdevelopment, with approximately 75% of the LDCs' population still in poverty, characterized by vulnerability to external economic shocks, natural and man-made disasters and communicable diseases. The 46 LDCs comprise 12 % of the world's population but

Graduation Thresholds: 2021 Triennial Review		
Gross National Income (GNI) per capita	Human Assets Index (HAI)	Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI)
GNI per capita: \$1,222 or above	66 or above	32 or below
Income-only: \$2,444 or above		

Source - UNDESA (economic analysis)

account for less than 2% of world GDP and around 1 percent of world's trade (source-UNCTAD). In order to graduate from the LDC category, a country must reach threshold levels of graduation in at least two of the three criteria at two successive Triennial Reviews undertaken by the UN's Committee for Development Policy (CDP). The three criteria are GNI Per capita, Human Asset Index (HAI) and Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI).

Bhutan's Graduation process

For a landlocked country like Bhutan, graduation from the LDC category would be a significant milestone in its development history. Since the inception of development plans in 1961, Bhutan has made tremendous socio-economic progress under the visionary and selfless leadership of successive Monarchs. Guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), people were placed at the center of development plans and programmes and many Bhutanese today enjoy a better quality of life with free access to health, edu-

cation and other essential services.

Bhutan was first assessed for graduation from the LDC category during 2009 Triennial Review, wherein it fulfilled only one criteria (with GNI per capita of around USD 1700). Bhutan was then found eligible for graduation in the two consecutive Triennial Reviews in 2015 and 2018 when it met two of the three criteria i.e. HAI and GNI. Subsequently, Bhutan's graduation was endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2018. Considering the preparatory period extended from three to five years for Bhutan, it stands to graduate in 2023.

Preparation for Graduation

Least Developed Countries are usually given a three-year preparatory period before it fully assumes the status of a low-middle-income country. At Bhutan's request, the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly granted Bhutan an additional two years. Bhutan will now graduate in 2023 coinciding with the end of the 12th Five Year Plan.

Concept of Least Developed Countries

The Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are a category of developing countries confronted with severe structural impediments to socio-economic development and are highly vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks and have low levels of human assets. This concept of LDCs originated in the late 1960s and the United Nations listed the first group of LDCs in 1971.

More than 50 years since LDC club was first pronounced, many countries in the LDC category still face the risk of deeper poverty and underdevelopment, with approximately 75% of the LDCs' population still in poverty, characterized by vulnerability to external economic shocks, natural and man-made disasters and communicable diseases. The 46 LDCs comprise 12 % of the world's population but account for less than 2% of world GDP and around 1 percent of world's trade (source-UNCTAD). In order to graduate from the LDC category, a country must reach threshold levels of graduation in at least two of the three criteria at two successive Triennial Reviews undertaken by the UN's Committee for Development Policy (CDP). The three criteria are GNI Per capita, Human Asset Index (HAI) and Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI).

Bhutan's Graduation process

For a landlocked country like Bhutan, graduation from the LDC category would be a significant milestone in its development history.

Since the inception of development plans in 1961, Bhutan has made tremendous socio-economic progress under the visionary and selfless leadership of successive Monarchs. Guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), people were placed at the center of development plans and programmes and many Bhutane today enjoy a better quality of life with free access to health, education and other essential services.

Bhutan was first assessed for graduation from the LDC category during 2009 Triennial Review, wherein it fulfilled only one criteria (with GNI per capita of around USD 1700). Bhutan was then found eligible for graduation in the two consecutive Triennial Reviews in 2015 and 2018 when it met two of the three criteria i.e. HAI and GNI. Subsequently, Bhutan's graduation was endorsed by the UN General Assembly on 13 December 2018. Considering the preparatory period extended from three to five years for Bhutan, it stands to graduate in 2023.

Preparation for Graduation

Least Developed Countries are usually given a three-year preparatory period before it fully assumes the status of a low-middle-income country. At Bhutan's request, the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly granted Bhutan an additional two years. Bhutan will now graduate in 2023 coinciding with the end of the 12th Five Year Plan.

Despite the negative impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Bhutan is well on track to graduate in 2023, ac-

ording to the CDP's LDC Monitoring Report 2021 (CDP). As recommended by the LDC taskforce of the Government, it is important to incorporate the Smooth Transition Strategies (STS) in the 13th FYP. The STS will help the country continue to pursue sustainable development priorities and the 2030 development agenda, as well as adjust and adapt to the phasing out of International Support Measures (ISMs) associated with LDCs.

Implications of Graduation

While Bhutan's graduation would be a significant achievement, this transition would entail the following implications:

1. Bhutan will lose access to specific ISMs such as in the areas of trade, ODA and funding support to attend inter-governmental meetings, training, etc. which are extended exclusively for LDCs.
2. RGoB's obligations and monetary contributions to UN and other International Organizations in the form of membership fees, assessed contributions, Government Contributions to Local Office Costs (GLOC), etc. may increase.
3. Graduation may also impact concessional loans from global and regional financial institutions, as well as funding from Global Funds like the Global Environment Facility (GEF)- (LDCF) and the Green Climate Fund.

However, as Bhutan's significant trade is with India and other neighboring countries like Bangladesh and Thailand, there will not be much impact on trade, even after graduation due to the existing bilateral arrangements and regional agreements such as the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (WTO & ETF). Moreover, some of the ODA consisting of grants, concessional loans and untied aid are also not strictly linked to a country's LDC status, which means that Bhutan could continue to receive them even after graduation.

Going forward

Over the years, Bhutan's steady socioeconomic development has significantly contributed to meeting the development thresholds set for graduation. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely disrupted sustained economic growth. Simultaneously, with graduation, Bhutan will enter into a more competitive global market with reduced benefits. More specifically, if the current economic downturn unleashed by the evolving COVID-19 pandemic continues, coupled with high unemployment and trade deficits, the fear of reversing decades of socioeconomic progress made by Bhutan looms large. Therefore, it is imperative that concerted efforts are channeled towards garnering and reinforcing international and bilateral partnerships including with financial institutions such as the World Bank, ADB, and so forth. Instituting such mechanisms would translate into enhanced trade through Aid for Trade (AfT) schemes. All the while, there is a need to enter

into bilateral arrangements to expand preferential market access.

WHO IN BHUTAN, THE SHORT WALK ON THE LONG ROAD TO HEALTH-FOR-ALL



First batch of nurses at Langjophaka hospital, 1962. From left matron Daw Dem, Pem Choden, Nim Dem, Choni Zangmo, Gyem, Namgay Dem and Tsendra Pem. (Picture Credit: WHO Bhutan)



Dr. Pem Namgyal

Director, Programme Management (DPM) WHO South-East Asia Regional Office, New Delhi

The World Health Organization (WHO), a specialized health technical agency, came into existence in 1948 but it was only in 1982 that Bhutan became a Member State of

WHO. However, Bhutan's engagement with WHO preceded its formal accession as a Member State.

Prior to the 1960s there were few Bhutanese trained in western medicine. The first modern hospital came up in 1956 at Langjophaka, Thimphu, overseen by the first MBBS doctor of the country, the late Lyonpo Tobgyel. It was Lyonpo who participated at the WHO/UNICEF International Conference on Primary Health Care at Alma Ata in 1978 that laid down the blueprint for the achievement of Health for All through the Declaration of Alma Ata on Primary Health Care (PHC). The timing was appropriate

as the country had begun accelerating efforts towards the development of a modern health care system suitable to its needs. Once formal association with WHO was established, Bhutan started the development of an exemplary PHC model for which Bhutan was awarded the WHO Sasakawa Health Prize in 1997.

Under the dynamic and visionary leadership of the Fourth King, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, development in health began earnestly in the 1980s and early 1990s. Where it took many decades and even centuries in some countries, Bhutan achieved the same in a few decades. WHO,

along with key partners such as the Governments of India and Denmark, UNICEF, UNFPA etc., firmly supported the Royal Government's efforts towards Health for All by 2000. Since the opening of the Liaison Office in Thimphu in 1982, WHO has been providing financial and technical support in advancing health care delivery systems and services in Bhutan.

It has indeed been phenomenal for Bhutan to achieve impressive development in a brief span of time. This was primarily due to the successive planned development efforts spearheaded by our visionary and dynamic Fourth King. Prior to 1960, the life expectancy of an average Bhutanese was below 40 years, which became 66.1 years at the turn of the century. And within two decades of the 80s and 90s, Bhutan had established a network of 29 hospitals, 160 Basic Health Units and 447 Outreach Clinics. More importantly, the traditional and modern system of medicine was integrated so that the 'old' and the 'new' stood side by side. And the last decade, under the golden rule of the Fifth King, His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, health sector's developments scaled even loftier heights - Bhutan today has 30 hospitals, 208 BHUs, 28 sub posts, 562 ORCs and a network of 54 traditional medical facilities around the country.

Yet the road towards Health-for-All remains a long one, both for Bhutan as well as WHO.

The rapid development and improved socio-economic situation of the country brings along with it changes in the demographics and diseases profile of the country. From an agrarian rural population,



A nurse checks the blood sugar of a patient at the Thimphu national referral hospital (Picture Credit: WHO Bhutan)

rapid urbanization driven by market economy is taking shape. Likewise, from primarily infectious diseases problems, the pattern is shifting to chronic, life-style related diseases. The old infrastructure was established on the basis of dispersed, far-flung villages but today with expansive road networks crisscrossing the country and large emigration to cities, many of these rural facilities are under-utilized or not used altogether. With the government being the single service provider and given the limited technical capacity, there is much that requires attention for further progress and development. Therefore, one may then ask, how can WHO help?

WHO's vision was Health-for-All by the year 2000 but it still remains a distant vision, with major challenges like shortage of funds in hiring highly skilled technical experts. Nonetheless, WHO continues to remain very important for global health, as evident from the current pandemic. It plays a vital role in shaping global health policies and strategies, and has unparalleled power to bring in diverse groups to work together

on global health issues. Even if WHO does not have the financial resources, it can leverage donors and countries to come together to fund country level work for health development. Therefore, WHO will remain an important partner for Bhutan in the years ahead.

The silver lining is that when Bhutan graduates from least developed country status, the contribution of WHO will continue unchanged, whereas other sources of external support may decline. In order to capitalize on the opportunity, Bhutan needs to re-look at the current policies and systems to adjust to emerging needs. Resources have to be targeted to pressing issues rather than trying to address all problems. Health sector needs to open up to the competition of private markets without compromise on quality and safety. While hospitals are important, investment in public health is equally important. For all the above requirements, WHO can provide the technical support and guidance on the best practices as well as financial resources.

THE UNITED NATIONS WE ASPIRE



Tenzin R Wangchuk

Ambassador/Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, Geneva

Amidst the gloom and uncertainty cast by the global pandemic, the Kingdom of Bhutan marked the Fiftieth anniversary of its membership to the United Nations through a series of events beginning from 21st September 2021. The national euphoria on reaching this historic milestone was markedly sedate and low key. Over the course of half a century, Bhutan gradually established itself as a peaceful, progressive and responsible member of this global body. We gave to the world “Gross National Happiness” as an

alternative to the global development paradigm. We have made the highest level of commitment on climate action. The first ever contingent of Bhutanese peacekeepers are being deployed to preserve international peace and security. We have also benefited in great measure from the United Nations Development System. Infact, through systems and rules put in place by the United Nations and international organizations, the whole world is better for it. A fundamental question we should reflect upon is “Can we make the United Nations serve us better?” An

attempt to deliberate on this question will be like opening the mythical Pandora’s box. Yet recent global events and contemporary practices have become too unsettling not to introspect on our flaws for a better future for generations to come.

The COVID19 pandemic caught the world completely unprepared and the hope that it would be contained as an epidemic was a miscalculation when the World health Organization declared it as a pandemic on March 11, 2020, three months after the first case was reported. As nations locked down international borders and airspace, we witnessed the greatest curtailment of human activities of our lifetime. Lockdown, social distancing, hand sanitizer, facemask, virtual meetings became bywords. Profiteers pushed costs of basic necessities. The advancement of science and technology accelerated the development of various vaccine platforms which were authorized for use by the World Health Organization under emergency use listing (EUL). *Availability/access to vaccines became a global issue. What was administered through the COVAX facility, established by the WHO to distribute COVID 19 vaccines, was inefficient and insufficient. The countries in the West stockpiled doses beyond their requirement, while developing countries scrambled around the globe looking for vaccines. Global access to COVID-19 vaccines has been unequal.* In low-income countries, less than 20% of the people have been vaccinated compared to a high of about 75% in high income states where the rest opted not to. In a span of two years, over half a billion people were infected with

the flu and over six million people died. To increase the availability of the vaccines, developing countries proposed a waiver of intellectual property rights on COVID-19 vaccines at the World Trade Organization. This was vehemently opposed by Europe and the West until a narrowed down compromise was reached after two years in June this year (2022), which may not necessarily address the issue for the developing countries. At the core of the difference is the entrepreneurial interest of the North versus the basic need of the South. Indeed, the notion of a global community, solidarity and fairness were far removed from their reality in the actions of states responding to the pandemic.

Just about when there was growing optimism of having seen through the worst of the pandemic, Ukraine happened, exacerbating the global economic woes including shortage of food and fuel. But, the greater concern is the inability of the United Nations to prevent an armed conflict and transgression of a member’s sovereign territory by another member state. Wasn’t the United Nations created to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war? *A European diplomat told me that they are extending material support to Ukraine to send a message that they will not stand by and watch weaker nations being bullied. I remarked that this is exactly what we are doing. That the United Nations remains a mere spectator as its Charter is made mockery of reveals the structural and conceptual flaws of the United Nations, which needs to be overhauled. The idea that the United Nations needs to be reformed*

is not new. An entree of proposals have been made and only those suiting the powerful member states have been cherry-picked. Meaningful reform and restructuring the functioning of the United Nations is not possible as long as the permanent members of the Security Council hold veto power. The veto power is a fail-safe mechanism which accords privileged reprieve to the PS members and their allies even when they are at fault. With a deep divide among the PS member states on several fronts, on matters concerning international peace and security, the United Nations can only watch and wait.

At the heart of the UN’s failure on matters concerning international peace and security is the issue of disarmament and nuclear deterrence. The known nine countries possess nuclear weapons enough to extinguish human civilization many times over. Rich and powerful countries are arming themselves to the teeth. In 2021, it was estimated that the global military expenditure reached US\$ 2.113 trillion. Compare this to a measly US\$ 138 billion provided by DAC countries as global development aid during the same period. While the global stockpile of nuclear weapons have reduced drastically, what remains is of no comfort to anyone including those who possess them. The direction is positive but when you are fleeing from a fire it is not just direction that matters but also speed. The United Nations must work together to arrest and reverse this trend. Rebuild trust among its members. The great Albert Einstein is quoted as having said “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will

be fought with sticks and stones' . This could very well come true.

The increasing politicization of the work of the United Nations including the specialized and international agencies is also a cause of concern. Increasingly irrelevant and controversial issues not always relevant to the work of an organization are introduced by member states to further their political interest. Oftentimes, the primacy of politics supersedes the normative functions of an organization. A great deal of time and resources are spent on political debates rather than the functional tasks they are created to carry out. It gets worse when member states use or are accused of using the organization against another member state to further their political interest or score points. In a deeply polarized United Nations, there are clear historical fault lines dividing opposing groups, some dating back to the cold war era. To complicate matters, new fault lines also emerge which permeate across the system and national positions on issues are driven not by the principles of the UN Charter or the mandate of the UN bodies but rather by their national interests.

The Human Rights Council, which is one of the most politicized inter-governmental bodies of the United Nations, was created in 2006 to replace the ineffective UN Commission on Human Rights. *If there is one perfect litmus test of the geopolitical divide in the United Nations, it is manifested in the workings of the Human Rights Council.* The Human Rights Council through their several mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Report, special pro-

cedures and mandate holders, and treaty bodies monitors the situation of human rights in every member state. Debates in the Human Rights Council are highly charged with accusation and counter-accusations flying across the hall. Naming and shaming is common and often independent mandate holders are subjected to ridicule and accused of overstepping their mandates or acting on-behalf of a vested group. Mandate holders and working groups of the OHCHR are allowed on country visits rather reluctantly. Member States often target the High Commissioner for taking sides. It is no surprise that the High Commissioner of Human Rights rarely seeks a second term. On a subject as vast as human rights and important as well, every member state has a sin of their own and often that sin is a nation's worst kept secret. No one member state can claim to be holier-than-thou. Again the concept of rights has different constructs and narratives among the members themselves, dictated by national interests and culture.

One of the greatest challenges we face today is climate change. Human activities over centuries have induced global warming and climate change and in turn it is changing our conventional source of livelihood and our ways of life - left unchecked - we are staring at the greatest human-induced disaster in the history of human civilization. There may be none thereafter. Since the entry into force of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in March 1994, twenty six Conference of Parties on climate change have been held till date with

the most significant being COP 21 where the world leaders concluded the Paris Agreement on climate change. The Paris Agreement on climate change represents one of the most successful outcomes of a multilateral process in recent time. However, there are elements of the Paris Agreement where finer details have not been agreed upon. The North-South are divided on the issue of generational justice - the historical responsibility of the global North versus the future responsibility of the developing south as the basis for equity. The end result is that global climate change actions are not at a pace we need to avoid the impact of climate change. The work of the United Nations as provider of humanitarian and development aid also needs closer examination in terms of their effectiveness. Since the creation of a group of Least Developed Countries in 1971, only six countries have graduated from this group with a few more slated to graduate in the next few years. While this is far from satisfactory, it is still a progress but not much to trumpet about. The United Nations Development System (Funds and Programmes) reports directly to the General Assembly and the Secretary General. However, each of these Funds and Programmes have different governance structures. In recent years, the UNDS have made an attempt to consolidate and coordinate their operational activities at the country level through the "One-UN" initiative and institution of the Resident Coordinator's post. While it is too early to judge the success of this initiative in terms of making them more effective, tensions and disagreements among funds



and programmes are visible at the country level and the agencies still remain traditional. The funds and programmes also do not necessarily bring substantial money in aid and their interventions can appear like a repeated band aid treatment for a festering chronic sore. The fragmentation and systemic incoherence of the UNDS has its origin in the behaviour of the member states themselves. Donors to the UNDS have increasingly moved resources from core to ear-marked and bilateral aid programmes to serve their interests.

A significant amount of donor funds are spent on maintaining a bloated and expensive workforce of the United Nations. The aid provided by the UNDS is also rendered less effective by the corrupt behaviour of national governments. The sense of entitlement by the aid recipient and the prerogative of the donors to choose rarely finds convergence. Our United Nations is seventy seven years old. If it is endured for these many years, there surely is something of value to it. By far, it is the largest and most representa-

tive global multilateral institution. Every member state, big or small, benefits from this global governance structure in different ways and measures. There is nothing that is not deliberated at the United Nations. Imagine our world without the United Nations. We would be living in a world of anarchy. The litany of issues and challenges facing the United Nations are nothing but creation of the member states. No member state can absolve itself of any failures of the United Nations - We are the United Nations. There are telling signs of the flaws of the UN which have grown over time. Just as the authors of the UN Charter aspired for a better world in 1945, so must the leaders of our generation as should the future generation. And to do that, we must find the collective will to reform the United Nations so that it serves humanity better.

MY EXPERIENCE AS A UNITED NATIONS MILITARY OBSERVER (UNMO) IN UNTSO MISSION – ISRAEL AND SYRIA



Sonam Wangchuk

Lieutenant Colonel
Royal Bhutan Army

Bhutan joined the fraternity of nations participating in UN peacekeeping operations in September 2014 by making a modest contribution of peacekeepers to a few peacekeeping missions around the world. This has only been possible due to the benevolent guidance and will of His Majesty The King. Just after four decades or so of being a proud member of the United Nations, the participation of the Bhutanese Armed Force officers as a “Blue Beret” under the UN flag reflects the realization of the noble vision of His Majesty The King to contribute directly for the maintenance of international peace and security.

A year-long tour of duty in the UN mission was filled with varied memo-

ries and experiences. The experiences of being abroad and serving in the international organization consisting of cultural shocks, change in organizational culture, and differences in food habits were overwhelming. Although peacekeepers representing different countries hail from a diverse range of environments and cultures they are bound together under the UN flag by the singular mandate of the United Nations.

It was in mid-2017 that I was deployed into the UNTSO (the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) which happens to be the first and the oldest UN peacekeeping mission. The mandate of the UNTSO mission states: “UNTSO Military Observers remain in the Middle East to monitor ceasefires, supervise armistice agreements, prevent isolated incidents from escalating and assist other United Nations peacekeeping operations in the region.” When I arrived at the UNTSO mission, most of its branches, especially in Syria, were closed due to conflict situations.

Headquartered in Jerusalem, the UNTSO mission is an officer-based mission with officers from 27 countries as of 2020. At its HQ, newly inducted officers from a myriad of countries undergo their induction training and driving test before getting deployed into various teams. The beautiful city of Jerusalem not only evokes a sense of awe for the

first-time visitor but also subtly manifests the complexity of the human belief system, urging peaceful coexistence by transcending differences. For instance, I was deeply perplexed to hear that the ‘temple of rock’—a prominent golden-domed shrine—was revered by all Muslims, Christians and Jews, thereby becoming a bone of contention for its ownership and care out of sheer reverence.

While most of the team sites and outposts towards the Syrian side were closed due to the ongoing civil war in Syria, being part of “Team Hermon” whose areas of responsibility was in the northern part of Israel, our team had outposts beyond the “technical fence” in the Area of Separation” which had to be manned despite the risk. Oftentimes, we would end up observing clashes between various armed groups in the demilitarized zone of the “Area of Separation.” Stray bullets would whizz over our heads and sometimes heavy explosive shells would fall too close to our outpost, sending earthquake-like tremors that would shake our beds, forcing us to run to the bomb shelter. Understandably, getting injured or killed by a non-state player would be quite a tricky affair for the UN organization to deal with.

After six months of my stay in Israel, the situation in Syria mildly improved with it gaining back control with the support of external



forces. Given this improved development, I received instructions to move to the Syrian side along with a number of fellow officers from other countries. The fact that a few countries had caveats against their officers being exposed to dangerous situations was telling enough in itself on what lay ahead.

Only days after our arrival in Syria, we were greeted with an aerial bombardment of towns just a few kilometers away. The roaring sound of the jet engines followed by the thundering noise of explosions melted my heart. The well-built city with tall buildings was later transformed into shattered walls and twisted iron and steel rods. The streets remained empty. The few people I met looked utterly traumatized, perhaps from the loss of property and their loved ones. Even to this day, any noise resembling an explosion takes me back to my days in Syria.

Due to a lack of dedicated UN housing in Syria, the UN Military Officers of the UNTSO were kept

in hotels, and I vividly reminisce one night when I was woken up by ground shaking explosions. After hurriedly putting on the PPE and heading outside, I could see a streak of lights flying across the starlit sky. We then rushed to the bomb shelter, with the “grab bag,”—a pre-packed bag that contained all the necessary items including the passport. Later it was learnt that missiles were fired in retaliation to the use of chemical weapons. Disfigured images of women and children due to the use of chemical weapons went viral on social media, only to learn a few days later that those photographs were found to be morphed. Such was the power, or rather the flip side of social media!

Serving in the multinational organization and dealing with officers from various countries was such that the particular officer portrayed the image and characteristics of the representing country to me. By extension, it also appeared to me that I and my behavior depicted the image and attributes of a secluded nation, Bhutan. This encouraged me to be on my toes all the time by being as efficient, hardworking, friendly and cooperative as possible, all the while not forgetting to display our unique nature of being Bhutanese. We Bhutanese have those innate qualities of being subtly different from others, say, the culture of never calling a superior by the first name, that intelligent hesitation of not being blatantly open, a willingness to serve beyond one’s assigned tasks, and other unique attributes such as exuberating a sense of gratitude, empathy, flexibility and composure. One of my friends from Finland remarked,

“You Bhutanese are unique.” That summed up the innate nature of the Bhutanese though it would be a bit of a stretch to claim that I represented all my fellow countrymen.

I returned from the mission one year before the global pandemic struck. It is fair to say that, back then, coughs and fevers were just coughs and fevers, and nothing more. Times have changed, though, since then. Looking back, I remain ever grateful for the opportunity and exposure that I could not have otherwise acquired from any classroom and for giving me the realization of what it feels like to live in a peace-loving country.

Even more so, it has been a blessing for being able to write this tale in spite of serving in one of the riskiest and volatile areas. By all accounts, it was a year well spent in foreign countries serving in the most esteemed organization with Bhutan’s national flag stuck proudly on the shoulder. With increased international visibility, coupled with more numbers of Bhutanese officers and troops serving in UN missions, our fellow Bhutanese would not be stopped for scrutiny at airports, just like I got stopped for further scrutiny at the Istanbul Airport in Turkey for more than an hour, only to realize that the person at the check-in desk did not know that a country named “Bhutan” existed.

NINE YEARS IN DARFUR AS A UN CIVILIAN TECHNICIAN: A PERSONAL ODYSSEY



B.K. Chettri

Ex UN Volunteer, Darfur

It was sometime in the spring of 2010 that I stumbled upon an advert sent out by UN Volunteer pro-

gramme HQ in Bonn, Germany, announcing a job opening in Microwave Communication Technology in Darfur, Sudan. I was then working for Tashi-Cell looking after international services. Prior to that, I had worked for a year dealing with microwave transmission before switching to Bhutan's first ever satellite communications, where I happened to be a member of the team that installed and commissioned the Earth Station in the erstwhile Department of Telecom, the precursor to what is today widely known as Bhutan Telecom.

Having made up my mind, I took up the challenge to work as a UN volunteer and accordingly sat for the interview. A month later, I received the news that I was selected for the post and was asked to join the mission as early as possible. It is fair to say that, back then, Africa was little known to me. I was, though, quite informed on the Darfur conflict of 2004 and 2005. Upon being selected for the post, the initial feeling was one of uncertainty — a lingering fear on the trade-off between the stable job at home and the initial six-month contract as a UN volunteer without



guarantee for job security. The worst fear was “what if the contract is not extended?” Notwithstanding such misgivings, the drive was to serve the prestigious UN organization. In June 2010, I joined the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). My arrival in El-Fasher, the political capital of Darfur, for my duty in the mission was welcomed with scorching midsummer heat with midday temperatures hovering between 42°C and 45°C. Considering that the mission was set up only a year prior to my arrival, infrastructure facilities were in their development stage. Owing to this, most of the mission staff had to be accommodated in shared housing hired by the mission.

Recalling the early days of my stint with the UN, mission life had been quite daunting. Security was tight. Extreme weather conditions meant that there was not much variety when it came to vegetable shopping. There was no access to TV and Internet connections; the only way to connect to my family was through a desk phone. Moreover, the presence of Bhutanese in the mission was quite minimal, eight of us to be specific. However, quite a number of Bhutanese UN peace-

keepers started joining different units with each passing year, eliciting in me a feeling of being at home. At the mission, I along with other team members were entrusted with connecting all the UN team sites across Darfur with a Microwave link to ensure better security coordination. Until then, lifeline links between HQ and other remote locations were connected through satellite phones, which had been an expensive affair, posing limitations on media exchange capacity. By virtue of working in the Field Technical Service Department, I had the opportunity to travel to all parts of Darfur to install, commission and troubleshoot network breakdowns. Although my service for the entire period did not have a direct bearing on the welfare of Darfur communities, the infrastructure that we built to connect HQ with far flung team sites enabled local telecom operators to provide mobile and data connectivity. This benefited the local Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) villages and provided opportunities for them to gain exposure to the outside world. Besides the assigned work responsibility, as UN volunteers, we were also mandated to train and assist national UN volunteers and local

staff in capacity building to ensure a gradual hand-over of responsibility. I along with my fellow volunteers would also undertake several field trips to the IDP camps for cleaning campaigns and other activities, including tree plantation, to raise environmental awareness. Looking back, the timeline between the early days of mission engagement and its withdrawal starting 2019, culminating into the final exit by the end of 2021, certainly saw a massive turnaround in the region. The engagement was typified by successful peace talks, a safer community, and relatively low crime rates. Despite its early exit, I personally feel that the mission had accomplished a majority of its targeted goals in Darfur.

Walking down the memory lane of my mission life, I feel humbled to have worked for the organization that embodies the hopes and aspirations of millions of people across the globe and for the opportunity to represent my King, country and fellow Bhutanese in a diverse global community. Notwithstanding the challenges and difficulties, as a civilian technical team, we did our best to restore peace and normalcy. My association with the UN, to all intent and purpose, was an adventurous and fulfilling experience, and will forever cherish as one of the highlights of my entire career.



MAXIMIZING VOLUNTEERISM TO COMPLETE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN BHUTAN



His Majesty The King awarded the Druk Thuksey Medal to Desuups in recognition of their extraordinary contributions to the nation on the occasion of 113th National Day.



Jigme Wangmo

Asst. Protocol Officer
Department of protocol

Background

While there is no single universally-accepted definition of the term ‘volunteerism,’ as per the United Nations (UN) Resolution A/RES/56/38, “volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good

and where the monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor”. More than 1 billion people volunteer globally, the majority serving in their own countries².

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) was established on 7 December 1970 and International Volunteer Day is celebrated on 5th December every year since 1985. People engage in volunteerism for numerous reasons such as to help eliminate poverty, improve basic

health and education, tackle environmental issues, reduce the risk of disasters or combat social exclusion and violent conflicts. Volunteers play vital roles in improving the way citizens are governed or engaged and making governments more accountable and responsive to their citizens. Volunteerism can also be a powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Volunteerism in Bhutan

Volunteerism in Bhutan is deeply grounded in its traditional belief systems and community practices such as fund raising for monasteries, organizing culture and arts programs, caring for the sick and elderly, assisting neighbors with construction of houses and cleaning campaigns. More organized forms of volunteering were seen in recent decades at schools, through civil society organizations and most significantly, with the establishment of the De-Suung (Guardians of Peace) programme. The programme was instituted by His Majesty The King in 2011 to encourage volunteerism and garner greater citizen engagement in nation-building. The volunteers, known as Desuups, adorn bright orange uniforms and are around 30,025 in numbers. Since its inception, they have been extending services to the nation during times of need, including disaster response and large-scale national events⁹. Bhutan’s success in combatting the pandemic is largely attributed to De-suups, who were assisting security forces, patrolling border areas, extending public services, delivering essential items

and facilitating the enforcement of COVID-19 protocols, among other essential tasks. Desuups are engaged in various skilling and re-skilling programs and road and water projects, aiding much needed areas and contributing to economic growth. The Prime Minister of Bhutan highlighting that Desuung Programme is a true exercise of how a nation’s transformation must take place, stated that “Desuups have become an integral component of the national human resources.”

Volunteerism for implementing SDGs in Bhutan.

The potential of volunteerism in aiding national development has not only been experienced first hand by Bhutan but has also received support at the United Nations. UN Secretary-General has acknowledged the contribution of the volunteers in achieving the SDGs, as well as encouraged Member States and other stakeholders to create conditions for volunteerism to achieve maximum impact on development results. Maximizing the benefit of volunteerism would entail strategic and tailored interventions centred around national needs. In the case of Bhutan, SDG Goals 1 (No Poverty), 4 (Quality Education), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 10 (Reduced inequalities) and 17 (Partnerships for the goals) were reported to be at risk in her second Voluntary National Review (VNR) of 2021. This was largely attributed to the effects of the pandemic as all seventeen goals except Goal 17 were assessed to be on track during the first VNR of 2018. Keeping in view the goals

at risk, following are the selected recommendations to accelerate implementation of SDGs in Bhutan.

1. Increasing SDG awareness:

Efforts of all stakeholders working together, including one billion volunteers worldwide will be needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda, as SG rightly highlighted. However, Bhutan’s VNR reported that most stakeholders have limited understanding and capacity to align agency plans and programmes to SDG targets and indicators. Moreover, weak coordination among stakeholders was highlighted in both the first and second VNRs of Bhutan that impacted the effective implementation of activities, within and across all sectors and at all levels. Across the world, volunteers are also playing a critical role in educating and informing citizens about the SDGs as volunteering connects people within local communities and across borders and cultures. As such, volunteers in Bhutan could also be deployed to raise awareness on SDGs among the citizens, who are the primary implementers of SDGs.

2. Collecting data and assisting in research:

SDGs require a “data revolution” to collect and analyze disaggregated data to monitor progress. Currently, in absence of a proper data-ecosystem, availability of real time data has been an impediment across all economic sectors in Bhutan. Volunteers can contribute towards measuring SDG progress through data collection as they can often get to places that others cannot and can form a bridge between formal and informal provision of public services including the poor

A CALL TO ACTION: BHUTANESE YOUTH LEADING THE WAY



Desuups in action for the Kurizam-Gyalpozhing Road Project under Desuung National Skilling.

and marginalized. In an effort to monitor SDGs as well as national development goals, Bhutan has developed an integrated platform called Dewa in 2021. The dashboard, complemented with the additional inputs from the volunteers can contribute towards a robust data and monitoring system in Bhutan.

3. Strengthening agriculture sector: Bhutan's poverty rate stands at 8.2%, out of which 93% reside in rural areas, where agriculture is the primary source of livelihood. Agriculture is constrained by increasing rural-urban migration, lack of facilities in rural areas and better income opportunities in other sectors. Despite 51% of the total population being employed in agriculture, Bhutan is far from achieving food self-sufficiency. 78,000 acres of arable land, a substantial area for a small landlocked country, remained fallow in 2020. The Volunteer Group at the High-Level Political Forum in 2017, stated that volunteers extend

new knowledge into rural settings, by assisting farmers in organizing themselves, promoting agricultural production and consumption cooperatives, operating feeding programs, distributing nutrition packages and providing nutrition education. Learning from the best practices shared by the volunteer group, Bhutan's volunteers can take up commercial farming in the fallow arable lands, teach farmers on best practices including mechanization and storage of foods and assist in the construction of key infrastructures in rural areas, where agriculture is primarily undertaken.

4. Engaging youth: Volunteerism is often the first experience of civic engagement for young people, and young persons play a major role in volunteering worldwide. Bhutan's youth considered those between 15 and 24 years constitute about 20% of the population. Youth unemployment is worrying with the rate reaching an all-time high of

22.6% in 2020, in the wake of the pandemic. Volunteerism in Bhutan is ingrained at a very young age through social activities in schools and incorporated in the National Youth Policy of Bhutan. Since 2020 the Desuung Programme trained more people, including youth, to meet increasing national needs during the pandemic. Desuung Skilling Program, a series of multiple short-term accelerated training by local and foreign experts in various fields including culinary, carpentry, fashion jewelry and robotics customised for the youth was initiated in 2021. This program has been successful in training the youth on one hand and benefiting the nation from their services, on the other.

Volunteerism has generated large-scale socio-economic benefits in Bhutan and many other countries. Volunteerism can transform the pace and nature of development and is strongest when it is recognized and supported. Therefore, it is important to ensure the safety and security of volunteers and create a conducive environment for volunteerism and volunteers to enhance the sustainability of development results. National and local governments, the UN system, the private sector, civil society, volunteer groups, and volunteers themselves have a role to play in creating and sustaining an enabling environment for volunteering. With only eight years left till 2030 and as we steer this Decade of Action, volunteerism is one practice that could accelerate the implementation of SDGs in Bhutan and beyond.



Tenzin Namgay & Tashi Dorji

Team: UN 50 Roadshow Coordinators

It was the very first time we heard the words "Change-Maker" and "Action Artist". Gerry would often stress on the word action, sounding like a film director – a cue for the scene to unfold, cameras to start rolling, and of course the actors to embrace their parts, and spring to action. This was towards the end of 2020, and before we knew it, we were planning for Bhutan's 50th anniversary as a member of the UN. Mr. Gerald Daly, the then Resident Co-ordinator for the UN in Bhutan in fondness is being referred to as Gerry.

2021 was a special and significant year for Bhutan like it was for many in 1971. History has it that a three-day holiday was declared on the morning of 22nd September 1971. It was a celebration of international recognition and the beginning of officially being part of the global community when the

National flag of Bhutan fluttered for the very first time at the UN HQ.

50 years have gone by, and we reflect upon the country's mindful journey into modernization and the role that the UN played. Is it a time for the UN to look back on its achievements and rest on old laurels? Or a call to achieve even greater results and occupy new areas of work and forge stronger partnerships?

Keeping up with the third decade of the 21st century, there has been a shift in the focus of messaging from world leaders – the emphasis on Youth and Environment. Now the next question arises: What does 50 years of the UN in Bhutan mean to Bhutanese youth? The answer emerged from our roadshows.

To commemorate Bhutan's 50th Anniversary as a member state to the United Nations, the roadshows were conceived with the aim of reintroducing conversations around the environment in schools and colleges. It was to provide a platform to think green, express concerns, design solutions, and most importantly empower them to take initiative. Holding the words "Change-Maker and Action Artist", we held a three-day environmental workshop, empowering the students to think both artistically and theoretically, creatively and innovatively about saving their environment.

Two types of roadshows were devel-

oped, one for schools and the other for colleges. The Art for Change Roadshow was designed for schools and facilitated by leading Bhutanese artists. It allowed the students to express themselves through different forms of art, and share their hopes for a green and safe planet. Even during lockdowns, the roadshows were held virtually, connecting students from across the country and bringing them together in one virtual setting. A special edition of the roadshow was conducted at the Wangsel Institute for the Deaf in Paro, coinciding with the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. With the use of sign language and interpreters, students could express their aspirations through arts and theatre, helping to promote Disability-Inclusive Climate Action and the equally important roles that vulnerable groups can play.

Side by side, the Change-Makers Roadshow focused on engaging tertiary level students. It was facilitated by the Global Shapers Thimphu Hub. This 3-day workshop included presentations on the fundamentals of Climate Change, hands-on group work, discussions on climate issues, and students pitching ideas related to eco-friendly products and ways of creating a safer and more sustainable environment in their localities.



Students put on a skit about waste and water scarcity in their village: Art for Change Roadshow at Wangbama Central School



Art for Change Roadshow at Wangbama Central School



Art for Change Roadshows held virtually

The roadshows steered the students and equipped them with the skills and mindsets towards bringing their own change and taking simple actions to address the climate change issues faced in their own communities. By the end of 2021, we had conducted ten roadshows and engaged with more than 350 students.

As a culmination of the roadshows, a series of cross-boundary events were planned. A LIVE Joint Panel discussion took place on “Why do Glaciers Matter” with the UN Resident Coordinators of Bhutan, Nepal, India, and the Director General of ICIMOD. Prior to the discussion, a Special Edition Glacier Tribute Talk between Youth Representatives from Bhutan, Nepal, India, and ICIMOD was broadcast LIVE on social media. As fellow countries of the Hindu-Kush Himalayan region, home to what is often called the Third Pole, the events were aimed to raise regional and global awareness on the retreat of the glaciers in the Himalayan region.

OUR GLACIERS ARE MELTING!
LET'S TALK ABOUT IT,
JOIN THE GLACIER TRIBUTE TALK ON
FACEBOOK

MODERATOR	PANELIST	PANELIST	PANELIST

• LIVE ON 7 DECEMBER ON FACEBOOK UNBHUTAN

BHUTAN: 8:00PM
NEPAL: 7:45PM
INDIA: 7:30PM

ICIMOD

Youth Conversations held on 7 December 2021: Glacier Tribute talk

INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN DAY
JOINT PANEL DISCUSSION

LIVE ON 9 DECEMBER ON FACEBOOK UNBHUTAN

Joint Panel Discussion held on 9 December 2021

On 11 December 2021, coinciding with the International Mountain Day, a Declaration drafted by students of the College of Natural Resources and with support from ICIMOD, various UN and government agencies, colleges, and CSOs, was presented to the Foreign Minister of Bhutan as the Chairperson of the National Environment Commission. The declaration was titled “Bhutan Youth Declaration on Climate Action, A call to Action for a living Himalayas”. A time capsule filled with the notes of over 1000 students from around the country to their future self - 25 years hence - described how they would contribute to climate action, was launched on the same day. The time capsule will be opened in 2046 when Bhutan will observe its 75th year as a member to the UN and this marked the closing of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary.



Presentation of the Youth Declaration on Climate Action by students on 11 December 2021

Bhutan Youth Declaration on Climate Action

BIHUTAN YOUTH DECLARATION ON CLIMATE ACTION

The Future We Want
A Call to Action for a Living Himalayas

We, the youth of the Kingdom of Bhutan,

CONCERNED about the impact of climate change in Bhutan and around the world;

SOLEMNLY ACKNOWLEDGING that Article 5, Section 1 of the Constitution of Bhutan places each of us in the sacred role of trustee of the Kingdom's natural resources and environment for the benefit of present and future generations;

RECALLING that Article 8, Section 2 of the Constitution of Bhutan endows upon all Bhutanese citizens a fundamental duty to preserve, protect and respect the environment of the country;

RECOGNIZING the urgent nature of the triple planetary crisis posed by climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss;

CONSIDERING that we hold Mother Earth in common with future generations;

IN SUPPORT of Bhutan's vision to create a Zero Waste Society by 2030;

Come together on this International Mountain Day, 11 December 2021 in Thimphu, Bhutan to make our voices heard for “The Future We Want”

PRINCIPLES

Each of us personally commits to the following principles. We call upon the Royal Government of Bhutan to adopt, embrace, and pursue these principles. We urgently call on the youth of Bhutan and the world to join us and sign onto this Declaration to ensure a Living Himalayas for all generations to come.

We will:

1. Be agents of change in realizing Bhutan's vision of a Zero Waste Society by **replacing all single-use plastics with biodegradable alternatives by 2023** and by taking everyday actions to reduce and recycle household waste including plastic.
2. Be **trustees of Bhutan's natural resources and environment** by devoting our creativity, energy, experience, passion, and expertise to climate action.
3. **Create public awareness of climate change and advocate for meaningful solutions.**
4. Call on the government to **include and promote climate change (e.g. PhD in climate studies in Bhutan) and disaster resilience literacy into school and university curricula** to equip youth with the knowledge and skills for climate action.
5. Create and seize meaningful opportunities for youth of diverse backgrounds to actively **participate in climate change related forums.**
6. **Reduce our individual and collective carbon footprints** by making sustainable choices available in our day-to-day lives through committing to use public transportation and call on the government to make public transportation more accessible for all.
7. **Accelerate the use of renewable energy (e.g. subsidize purchase of electric cars) and phase out fossil fuel subsidies by 2023** to support sustainable communities.
8. **Pursue and enhance cooperation with governments and civil society at home and in neighboring countries** in a new spirit of partnership to meet the challenges posed by the melting glaciers of the Himalaya; protecting biodiversity, eliminating cross-boundary pollution and reducing climate change-induced disasters.
9. Call on the government to **promote more climate-smart agriculture** to ensure greater food security.
10. **Be custodians of Bhutan's natural resources and environment** by recognizing our responsibilities and fostering our abilities to uphold and advocate for climate action.
11. **Actively promote better preparedness for climate-induced disasters and emergencies** to ensure social safety, security, and stability.
12. **Volunteer to make a difference** in the lives of people vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Thimphu
11 December 2021

So what does the Declaration say?

The Declaration outlines specific roles and pledges made by the students and highlights the important role that youth can take together to combat climate change and work towards Climate Action. First and foremost, students pledged to become agents of change in replacing all Single-Use plastics with biodegradable alternatives and taking everyday action. Reminding how plastics fill every aspect of our lives, enabling our youth to adopt sustainable methods can bring forth a sense of environmental stewardship. To make the action work we must find the ‘tipping point’ which, according to Malcolm Gladwell is identifying the key that makes things happen. We do not plan to replace and reduce all plastics overnight, but to start small and strong. This can only be achieved through collective awareness, ownership, dedication and smart action to shape a country of Zero Single-Use plastic.

Unlike in 1971 when the celebration lasted three days, the celebrations for UN Bhutan's 50th anniversary carried on the whole year, supporting and empowering the role of Bhutanese Youth in taking Climate Action.


Nowadays, every time we hear the word action, the word Climate rings, and a slight nudge is felt.


The Kingdom of Bhutan awaits...


Here is what you need to know

- No Minimum Daily Package Rate
- No surcharges
- Tourist can apply for their own visa
- Tourist can plan their own itinerary
- Stay in certified accommodation
- Mandatory engagement of tour guides
- Pay the government prescribed SDF

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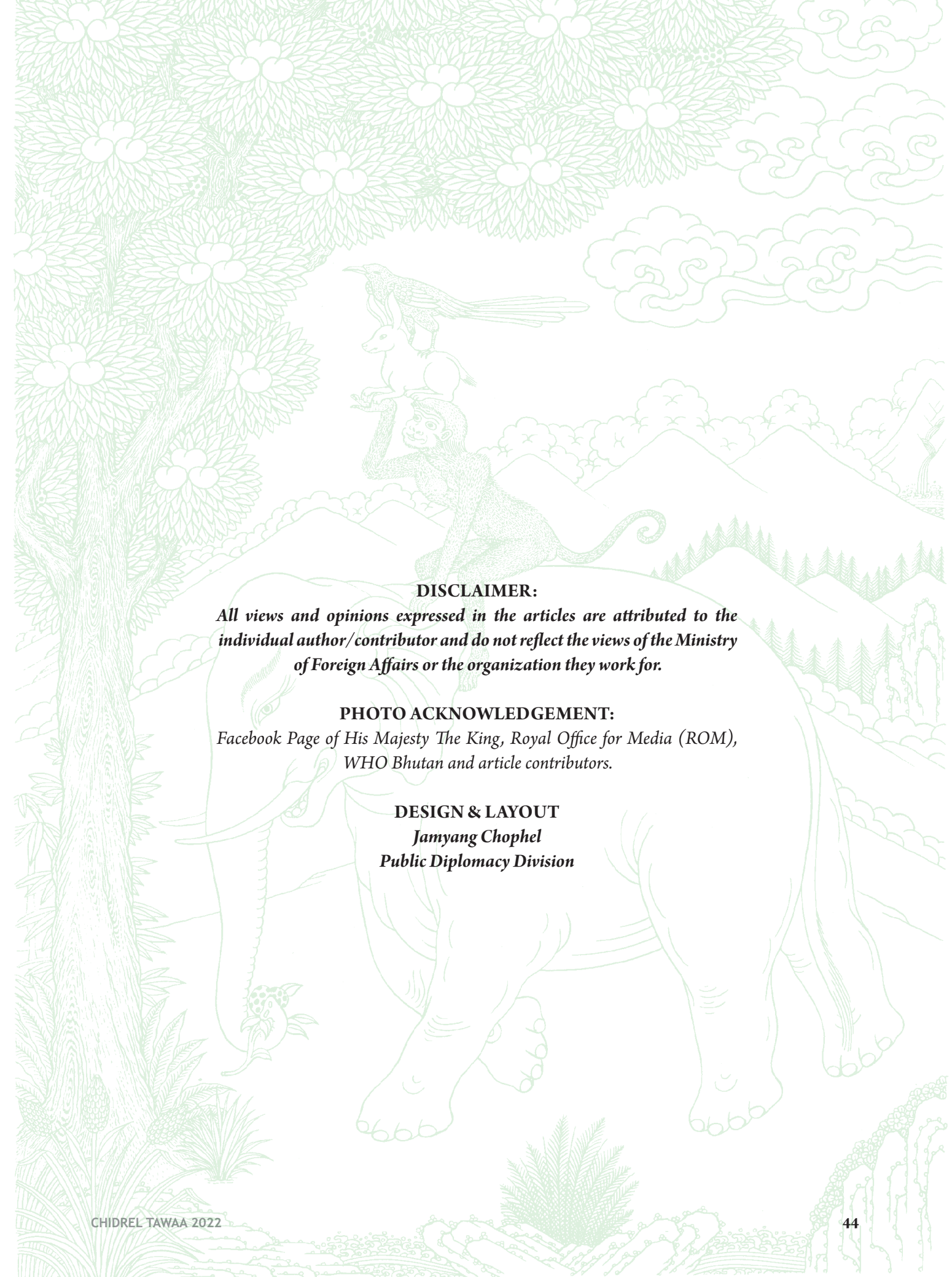
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