

**Statement by
H.E. Mr. Yeshey Dorji, Foreign Secretary
of the Kingdom of Bhutan**

**Special Session of the General Assembly on the
Follow-up to the Programme of Action of the
International Conference on Population and
Development beyond 2014**

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**Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentleman,**

On behalf of the delegation of Bhutan, I would like to extend our warm greetings to all the participants of this Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly. With the 20-year deadline for achieving the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) fast approaching, this high-level review is most timely. I thank the United Nations secretariat for organizing this event to define a clear path to a more equal and sustainable world for the 7 billion people who share it.

Mr. President,

The Cairo Summit marked a paradigm shift in our approach to population and development by placing individual rights at the center of population and development policies. It also brought to our attention a holistic range of issues that included economic growth and sustainable development; the empowerment of women; urbanization; education; and technology. In addition, as highlighted in the Secretary General's report, we have made significant gains in population health and life expectancy, protection of human rights and moved an estimated 1 billion people out of extreme poverty. However, while much has been accomplished our agenda on this important global issue is far from being completed.

In my own region, the detailed analysis by the UN reveals that significant challenges still remain in the implementation of ICPD. And while it is reassuring that the Programme of Action on ICPD has been extended beyond 2014 and that this review process will inform and shape the post-2015 development agenda, many of these challenges require urgent attention if the progress and achievements since the Cairo Summit are to be sustained.

Mr. President,

A key development challenge that needs to be urgently addressed is the issue of sustainability and the growing inequality and disparities that exist within and among nations, which particularly impact vulnerable groups such as the poor, the elderly, the disabled, rural populations, women and youth. The

Secretary General has aptly underscored this challenge in his Report, *and I quote*:

“Our greatest shared challenge is that our very accomplishments, reflected in ever-greater human consumption and extraction of the Earth’s resources, are increasingly inequitably distributed, threatening inclusive development, the environment and our common future.” Unquote.

In this context, my Government is committed to ensuring that development is both inclusive and sustainable and has adopted “*inclusive green socio-economic development*” as the overarching objective of Bhutan’s Eleventh Five Year National Plan. To this end, a key strategy in our national plan is addressing multidimensional poverty and the special needs of vulnerable groups through targeted intervention programmes. With “conservation and sustainable utilization of the environment” as one of the four pillars of our development framework, Bhutan is committed to build a green economy that ensures carbon neutral development at all times. In this regard, the continued support and cooperation of our development partners, particularly in building the necessary infrastructure and our productive capacities, will be crucial.

Mr. President

Like many other developing countries, Bhutan is experiencing rapid demographic change. As a country with about 65 percent of its population in the age group of 25 and below, the potential for a “demographic dividend” is at its peak. However, unless we implement the measures that are necessary to harness this dividend, our adolescents and youth will find themselves to be casualties rather than agents and beneficiaries of development. Enhancing access to high-quality education and vocational training that is relevant to the changing needs of our social and economic development process is therefore a key priority in our national development plan. Related to this is the issue of youth unemployment and underemployment for which my Government has been increasingly engaging the private sector, including imparting of training and skills development, promotion of FDI and the direct promotion of small and medium enterprises to enhance gainful employment opportunities for youth.

Rapid urbanization due to rural-urban migration has also proven to be an increasingly complex challenge for Bhutan. With 60 percent of our population still in rural areas, the pace of urbanization will inevitably intensify in the

near future and outpace our current capacity to provide basic infrastructure and public services to urban residents. Ensuring access to land, housing, water, sanitary and waste management services and livelihood, particularly for the urban poor are new dimensions to the development challenges that we face.

Mr. President,

The issue of gender equality, equity and empowerment of women must continue to receive the highest priority if we are to realize the full implementation of the ICPD. In this regard, Bhutan continues to carry out the recommendations of the Programme of Action to promote women's rights and facilitate their full participation in the socio-economic development and the political and decision-making processes. Bhutan took measures to promote the well being of women and children as far back as 1981 when it ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Following this ratification, the National Women's Association of Bhutan was established with a mandate to address issues related to women and also to fulfill our obligations under CEDAW. In order to further strengthen the national machinery for women, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was instituted in 2004. Since 2008, the Commission was upgraded to a fully autonomous agency with a Women Division dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of women and the girl child through gender mainstreaming efforts; legal and policy interventions; advocacy programs; and activities that enhanced their socio-legal protection and economic empowerment. Most recently, the 11th FYP has placed high priority on monitoring and data generation by gender as well as interventions on gender equality in the Local Governments. It will address visible gender gaps in the areas of education—tertiary and vocational levels—employment, political representation, and violence against women.

We also note and welcome the strong role of civil society for realizing the agenda of ICPD and have taken concrete measures to encourage their establishment. While we had just a couple of CSOs in 1994, Bhutan now has 38 registered CSOs consisting of 29 Public Benefit Organizations and 9 Mutual Benefit Organizations.

Mr. President,

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the support of all our development partners and the efforts of UNFPA and the Commission on Population and Development towards the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that Bhutan remains resolute in its commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action and to further incorporating all its aspects into our national planning process. We hope that our renewed political commitment to the ICPD Programme of Action will be backed by a strong commitment from our development partners to provide the financial and technical assistance that are necessary for full achievement of its goals and objectives. My delegation looks forward to working to ensure that the ICPD Programme of Action remains a high priority in the post-2015 development agenda.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!