

**Statement by H.E. Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Hon'ble Foreign Minister at the
72nd Session of the UNESCAP, Bangkok, Thailand**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me and my delegation to attend the 72nd Session of the UNESCAP, here in the beautiful city of Bangkok.

Mr. Chairman, I congratulate you on your election, and assure you of my full support in discharging your responsibilities. I thank the Chair of the 71st Commission for his able leadership over the past one year.

I also thank H.E. Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of ESCAP and her able team for the excellent arrangements and documentation provided for the meeting.

Mr. Chair,

It is timely and fitting that the 72nd Session of ESCAP is being held under the theme "Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development", as science and technology would be, most certainly, an effective tool in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 Development Agenda. The theme also resonates with the outcome of World Summit on Information Society to expand the use of ICT.

As Bhutan is a mountainous country, the benefits that ICT provides in linking the country are immeasurable. For this reason, Bhutan has invested heavily on ICTs including taking fiber optics to almost every corner of the country and establishing community centers to empower our citizens on making the best use of ICTs. Furthermore, the Government-to-Citizen office under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister has been established to simplify and enhance the delivery of public services to our citizens. However, we continue to be challenged by the limited human

resource capability within the country; here we would like to commend the work of ESCAP in promoting and strengthening regional ICT connectivity, and in particular thank UN APCICT for its indispensable capacity-building support.

Mr. Chair

The vision and principles outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are in consonance with Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness that pursues to achieve a balance between socio-economic, environmental, cultural and spiritual needs of the society in an enabling setting of good governance. Therefore, it is not surprising that all SDGS except SDG 14 on oceans are aligned with our 16 National Key Result Areas of the 11th FYP current with its holistic approach on development under the theme "Self reliance, inclusive and green socio-economic development'. A rapid mapping assessment between the targets of the 11th Five Year Plan and the SDGs has shown that out of 143 SDG targets relevant to Bhutan, 134 SDG targets are already integrated in our development plan. We now need to establish clear linkages between the targets and the type of programmes and strategies to realize the SDGs. Taking this opportunity, we thank UNDP for identifying Bhutan as a "SDG Priority Country", through which UNDP will be providing technical assistance to support Bhutan's effort to implement and localize SDGs in national policy and programs.

A noteworthy suggestion made in the 2016 Report of Asia-Pacific Countries with Special Needs Development is the optimal pathway of implementing the SDGs for countries with special needs i.e prioritizing attainment in a relatively small number of indicators, sequenced over a period of time. It gives me great pleasure to share that Bhutan has already embarked along the similar line as the suggested optimal pathway as we have already prioritised 3 SDG goals: Goal 1 on poverty, Goal 13 to combat climate change and Goal 15 on terrestrial ecosystems, for the remaining period of

11th FYP until June 2018. The second phase of prioritization of SDGs shall be introduced in the 12th FYP, the preparation of which is already underway.

Poverty reduction remains an overriding priority in Bhutan's development plans; it also features as one of the 16 National key Result Areas of the 11 FYP. Having made commendable progress in reducing poverty from 23.2 % in 2007 to 12 % today, and keeping in line with SDG goal of ending poverty in all its forms by 2030, Bhutan has gone beyond income poverty to deal with issues like social protection and vulnerable groups.

Bhutan is highly vulnerable as a "landlocked" country with a fragile and mountainous ecosystem. High dependency on climate sensitive sectors like hydropower and agriculture and the threats from rapidly melting glaciers only enhances Bhutan's vulnerability to adverse impacts of climate change.

Even though Bhutan is a net sink for greenhouse gases and is carbon negative with 72% of our country under forest cover, and more than half of our country protected as national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, we have pledged in 2009 to remain carbon neutral. We have now taken another innovative step to create a climate change fund called "Bhutan for Life" in collaboration with WWF; this fund once implemented will conserve nearly 6 million acres of forest and other habitat and will considerably enable Bhutan to remain economically and environmentally sustainable.

More recently, Bhutan joined the global undertaking by signing the Paris Agreement on April 22 during the High-Level Signing Ceremony on the Paris Agreement for Climate Change in New York.

Mr. Chair.

Continued support and cooperation of our development partners is crucial in delivering on the promises and pledges made on the means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda, particularly for the LDCs, for whom ODA not only complements, leverages and sustains development but it continues to remain the single largest source of finance for development.

Bhutan is faced with major macro economic challenges mainly due to its narrow industrial base and high dependency on a single sector. This is compounded by the fact that Bhutan is not only a landlocked least developed country but also a highly mountainous country. Diversification of our economy and investing in our infrastructural needs are critical in addressing these challenges.

Bhutan has made considerable progress in financing all our recurrent costs and some of the capital expenditures from our domestic resources. However, large gaps still exist in finding adequate financing for development projects and programmes for which we will continue to require the support of international development financing among others.

Mr. Chair

The relevance of ESCAP and purpose of its founding is ever more today with increasing focus on regional cooperation and integration. This is largely due to growing importance of cross-border cooperation and connectivity in combating common challenges and vulnerabilities, and benefiting from shared prosperity as well.

Sustained regional growth in the region has enhanced its share in the international global market resulting in an impressive reduction of poverty. But this has left a