

# BHUTAN

## Address at the High -Level Conference on the World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy

Mr. Chairman,

Your Excellency Mr . Ban Ki- moon, UN Secretary General,  
Distinguished Heads of Delegations, UN Agencies, Members of NGOs and the  
Scientific Communities, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my highest honor and privilege to represent my country, the Kingdom of ~~Bhutan~~, to this High- Level Conference on World Food Security: the Challenges of Climate Change and Bio-energy. This is an appropriate theme and time, to discuss, and share experiences at this juncture when the global food crises is sweeping across the world, irrespective of the whether the countries are small or big, poor or rich.

I bring to this Conference, Greetings and Good wishes of my King, the Prime Minister, and the people of Bhutan. As you may have heard, Bhutan became the youngest democracy following general election in March this year. The people of Bhutan voted in the Druk Phuensum Tshopa Party (DPT), and Lyonpo Jigme Y. Thinley became the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Bhutan. A voter turn out of over 75 % of the population from all corners of the country came out to exercise their franchise despite doubts and reluctance when democracy was announced last year.

However, while we hail our successful transition to democracy, we are deeply saddened by the immeasurable losses caused by recent earthquakes and cyclones in the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Myanmar. The people and the government of Bhutan asked my delegation to convey their deepest condolences and prayers to those brave peoples in these two countries who continue to endure so much pain and sufferings in the wake of these disasters.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,

Bhutan is an agrarian country with more than 69 % of its population depending on farming. The land holdings are small and the settlements are scattered in steep valleys, slopes and hills of this mountainous country. The farmers grow traditional cereals, vegetables and keep livestock to provide daily essentials to their family members in remote areas. There is no room for our farmers to convert arable land or food crops into bio-fuel production. Those farmers who are connected by roads, markets and social facilities, have switched to more specialized farming systems. Improved rice, wheat and maize have replaced traditional varieties, and potato crop has displaced local minor cereal crops in the event of available markets. Whether in the remote or more accessible farming areas, the major source of plant nutrient comes through recycling of organic residues. We strongly believe that this is one of the effective ways to sequester carbon.

We are producing about 67,000 tons of paddy, 90,000 tons of maize and 25,000 tons of potatoes annually. Yet, we are net importer of rice importing over 40,000 tons of rice annually to meet our demands, roughly about 50 % of our requirements. This can be attributed to both social and economic reasons as Bhutanese love to eat rice three times a day if they can afford it. The per capita consumption of rice is recorded at 172 kg. If we can substitute rice with either maize or potato, we should be in a good position to meet the food requirements for a population of a little over 670,000 people.

The current global food crisis is a big lesson for a small landlocked country like Bhutan which depends on other countries for food, edible oil and energy (fuel for transportation). Unlike other countries, the impacts were not so sharp in Bhutan as the Government of India has generously considered our request to continue to exporting rice and edible oil to Bhutan inspite of a ban put on exports to other countries to safeguard food availability to its own citizens. The most effected consumers during this short span were the low income groups in the urban areas, and some of the landless people who were totally dependent on imported rice. Our rural subsistence farming communities were <sup>less</sup> least effected. These farming communities living hours away from the road heads, had their traditional <sup>HISK awerscom</sup> systems in place, such as crop diversification to produce more than one crop, and had stored grains in place

to meet family requirements. What we are concern<sup>ed</sup> for these remote farming communities is the accessibility to social services, and low intake of protein and micro nutrients in their diets.

**Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,**

We have been following the debates on global warming, and it has now become more convincing than before with signs of unusual weather pattern cropping up from all corners of the earth. In our local context, we had a number of incidences where farmers have left their land fallow because of water shortages or delayed rains or increased pests outbreaks, and damages caused by flash floods and storms. The eastern part of country was worst hit with more than 500 houses damaged, and hundreds of acres of crops destroyed by unusually powerful storm that swept across the eastern part of the country in May this year. Perhaps, this effect may have been an extension of the impact of the natural disaster struck our neighboring countries.

Dry land farming constitutes about 75 % of arable land. Farming relies heavily on timely seasonal rainfall, adequate soil moisture and recycling of organic residues. Erratic variations in rainfall or soil moisture with global warming are likely to affect more than 80 % of the farming communities. Rapid access to these communities in the event of natural calamities such as crop failure, crop damages by out breaks of pests and diseases, and other disasters, would be our biggest challenge given the extremely mountainous terrain and remoteness of some of these pockets.

In addition to the above reasons, food security in Bhutan is also negatively affected by our stringent conservation ethics. Annually, our farmers lose up to 40 % of their harvest owing to crop raids by wildlife species like wild boars, monkeys, deer, and elephants. We are coming under increasing pressure to review our conservation policies in order to address this problem. Unless we come up with innovative schemes to compensate for the losses, we may have to compromise on our conservation goals.

**Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,**

In July, we will be launching our 10<sup>th</sup> five year plan developed with the over arching goal of alleviating poverty through balanced regional development and targeted local interventions. Poverty is largely a rural phenomenon in our context, and we firmly believe that only through concerted efforts to develop the agricultural sector, can we achieve our targets. We do have a wide range of agro-ecological zones stretching from wet sub-tropical to cool temperate but increases in production are limited by small arable land holdings coupled with poor access to technologies and markets. In the event of food crisis like the current one affecting the world, we realize that even with the export of our clean energy through hydropower, we may not be in a position to buy foods if exporting countries ban export to safeguard their own needs. We are committed and determined to create enabling environments to increase production and productivity. Revitalization of agriculture research and extension systems through increased investments, construction of farm roads to connect rural communities, zoning arable land, and crop insurance schemes to encourage farming, are some of the proposed measures. These proposed measures will not come at the expense of strong environment conservation ethics.

**Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentleman,**

On behalf of the people and government of Bhutan and my delegation, I would like to congratulate the Director General of FAO and his staff for successfully hosting this high level conference and to convey our appreciation of the excellent cooperation we continue to enjoy. Let me also convey our sincere appreciation to all our other bilateral and multilateral development partners present here for the continued support to the socio-economic development of my country. With our united efforts, I remain confident that we will be able to implement the recommendations from this conference to address this food crisis that is looming across the world.

Thank you for your attention.