

## **Concluding Remarks by the Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan**

The Conference on Deepening and Sustaining Democracy in Asia has come to an end.

I hope I am not alone in believing that it has been a successful one; a productive three day discourse on the subject of one of the oldest of human institutions.

Yet we continue to be perplexed and challenged both conceptually and in practice, by what it really means and how best it can serve societal interests. What we all seem to agree is that democracy everywhere is at risk and that it is an ongoing process along perilous paths, giving reasons for some to choose more alternative, 'predictable' options.

We spoke of liberal and illiberal democracy; of it being an end in itself while others think it is a process or form for the delivery of societal goods; we heard others insist on democracy meaning different things to different peoples and countries as may be dictated or shaped by the milieu and the context within which it must function.

We spoke of prerequisites to democracy and decentralisation; of serious flaws in our electoral systems and of separate spheres of democracy: social, economy and political. And of course, we even heard, rather disconcertingly, of the media being hijacked by consumerist considerations as well as of retribution for those who cannot abide with rule of law.

Democracy is what most of us have chosen and it is what we believe will continue to be tested and challenged by a host of external and internal factors and variables. There isn't a perfect democracy and probably will never be, at least, not of the kind that we can all accept as the perfect model. To each, its own, is what we generally must accept, it seems. But it is through common endeavours like this that we, as actors in our respective fields, can contribute to making our individual democracies function a little better and become a little more creative

and resilient against the day to day threats that democracy will continue to face not unlike any other form of human organisation.

The range of topics we have covered in these three days has been impressive to say the least. Each one of the resource persons made excellent presentations and did not fail to stimulate and provoke a full range of thoughts and reactions from the panellists and from the floor. Chairing by the leaders of the government delegations was superb as were the remarks they made about their personal and national experiences. What was particularly noteworthy was the frank, uninhibited and the most cordial manner in which the prolonged deliberations took place both within the confines of this room and outside in the hallways and at the dining tables, and perhaps, in some of the local bars. All in all, it was a celebration of the spirit of democracy, of the good and enlightened society that it is expected to promote - of the GNH that it must help realise.

On the part of the organisers, we have agreed that this discourse must not end in Paro; that it is too important an undertaking to be terminated; that just as democracy is a dynamic process, our dialogue must be an ongoing endeavour. And so I am most pleased to announce that His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Maldives has, most graciously, consented to host the next conference on democracy in the mellow season of Autumn, 2010. He has given assurances that, unlike the Cabinet session which is being held under water this week in the island paradise, our meeting will be held on the firm surface of one of its many coral islands.

Allow me to conclude with my own vote of thanks to the many who made this event possible:

To Claire van der Vaeren and the UNDP, to Dasho Karma Ura and the CBS, to Dasho Daw Penjo and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; to Dasho Chenchu, the Governor of Paro and his colleagues; and finally, to the CEO and the management of Zhiwa Ling Hotel.

I wish you all Bon Voyage and Tashi Delek. It has been a great privilege for the Kingdom of Bhutan to have received you