

FOREWORD

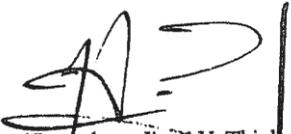
The Regional Conference on Deepening and Sustaining Democracy in Asia held in Paro, Bhutan, during October 11-14, 2009 was a landmark. Twelve countries from South Asia and the greater Asian region, eminent resource persons from the rest of the world, and representatives of media, civil society and the development community involved in the theory and practice of democracy benefitted from the exchange of ideas and experiences at this event.

The conference marked the beginning of a regional dialogue on how to collectively address the challenges of deepening democratic culture and maximising its dividends for development in harmony with the rich traditions and ethos of respective countries. With democratically elected governments in power in all South Asian countries, the region is now at a crossroads – take steps to sustain and consolidate democratic principles in governance, or face the risks of a roll-back of democracy.

The rich mix of conference participants brought to the fore critical foundational insights and practical experiences and lessons in democracy. All participants agreed that the basic guiding principles of democracy – such as freedom of expression, inclusive participation and equal access to justice – are common to all. Each country must develop its own tools and mechanisms to put these principles into action. These perspectives have been documented in the present report, which serves as both a record of the proceedings of the Conference as well as the repository to the wealth of resource materials presented at this forum.

Asia has the promise of sustaining democracy with democratically elected Governments in all of South Asia and in many other parts of the region. The Paro Conference was a first step in the regional dialogue on democracy, which the participants felt should be pursued to carry the momentum forward with the Republic of Maldives agreeing to host the next conference in 2010.

It is hoped that the Report's insights will inspire greater appreciation for democratic values and principles and ultimately inform people's choices in the region and beyond.



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For a summary of each discussion during the Conference please visit the Centre for Bhutan Studies website www.bhutanstudies.gov.bt

The summaries were provided by the following rapporteurs: Stefan Priesner, Chenchu G Dorjee, Farhan Sab, Irman G Lanti, Phuntsho Raptan, Samuel De Jargere, Karma Wangdi, Surekha Subarwai, Naima Mohamed, Kuenzang Lhadon, Sumeeta Banerji and Tashi Dorji.