

Remarks by Nicholas Rosellini, UN Resident Coordinator in Bhutan

At the outset, I would like to thank the Centre for Bhutan Studies for inviting me to the opening ceremony of the Fourth GNH Conference. I feel very privileged to address this distinguished gathering on a subject that has been personally both enriching and interesting to follow.

As you all know, since the 1980s, the world has felt the need for a development yardstick that not only measures economic progress through Gross National Product and per capita income but also captures other aspirations of a society. There was growing evidence that existing methodologies did not reflect the quality of life of the people and that the world was ready for an alternative measurement of human progress. This led to the development of the human development approach and the associated index which includes income, longevity and education.

On the other hand, little known to the rest of the world and much before this pluralist notion of development and human progress was to gain momentum, His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan stated that Bhutan's development should be guided by the philosophy of gross national happiness. I know most of you present here have followed and been part of the interactions in international conference settings or otherwise, on both the conceptual understanding and the complementarities of GNH with other development paradigms. While many methods have attempted to move beyond purely materialistic interpretations of human progress, none has yet gained broad-based acceptance among academics and development practitioners. Hence the importance of this conference where alternative approaches can be discussed and refined, benefiting from different international perspectives.

I strongly believe that in this globalised world, the GNH philosophy has strong credibility to rekindle global concern for the common interest and the public good. This is especially true in our turbulent times when many countries face severe economic problems, caused at least in part by our own excessive preoccupation with profit and consumption.

In the developing world especially, the livelihoods of millions of people are in jeopardy due to a crisis for which they had no responsibility. This situation could lead to major setbacks in reducing extreme poverty and, more broadly, in progress towards all MDGs.

We, at the United Nations System in Bhutan have been fortunate to partner with national agencies such as the Centre for Bhutan Studies and the Gross National Happiness Commission to assist in their elaboration of the messages of GNH and defining means to measure the country's progress and translating this vision into reality. We are privileged to have had the opportunity to join the discourse on GNH and be part of the various developments that have taken place since Bhutan's unique and inclusive development philosophy attracted attention internationally. We are confident that the work done here in Bhutan through conferences such as this will eventually influence the way we take forward development in many other countries.

While concepts such as human development with its HDI methodology continue to be relevant, we all know that the global environment has changed significantly since it was first introduced. The financial, food and fuel crises serve as very visible illustrations of this dynamic. It is in the spirit of recognizing this changing and varied nature of reality that we must continue to re-assess the relevance of development paradigms and search for alternatives. I feel that from this vantage point, GNH continues to give a refreshing perspective to development and it is encouraging to note that this conference will help Bhutan's endeavours in developing relevant indicators and indices to use GNH both as a

policy tool and as a measurement to assess the country's development progress.

It is also in this context of searching for alternatives, that I am happy to share that UNDP in association with Oxford University has recently initiated a study into understanding the missing dimensions of poverty. In this regard, Bhutan's on-going efforts to measure development through the GNH index, particularly those related to culture, psychological well-being, community vitality and other social safety nets (that I understand will be discussed at this conference) will be relevant dimensions that need to be addressed.

If this ongoing discussion on the HDI in different countries and with many contributors is any indication, then I think we are ready for a drastic change in the way we perceive poverty or human progress. Interesting dimensions similar to the ones related to the various domains and indicators developed for GNH such as the security, institutional or government performance, violence factor and community relations are being suggested for consideration as further dimensions of poverty and development.

In this context, I am reminded of the powerful message of His Excellency Prime Minister's statement at the 63rd UN General Assembly where he warned against the world's unsustainable and irrational way of life, whereby we are simply transferring our many debts to future generations who are not here to argue against it. From the UN perspective, new global solutions are needed that recognise the vulnerability of poor countries to the negative impact of interconnected crises – financial instability, climate change, volatile prices for food and energy, and unacceptable levels of hunger, poverty and inequality. We simply cannot address the challenges of the 21st century with the instruments of the 20th century.

May I conclude with this ardent hope that His Majesty the Fourth King's noble vision of Gross National Happiness be a gift of Bhutan to humanity, humanity deeply in need of it. I wish you all

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a productive conference and a happy stay in this beautiful country.