

Statement by Ambassador Yeshey Dorji of Bhutan on the occasion of the General Assembly Meeting of the Society Switzerland-Bhutan (SSB) at the Musee d'Ethnographie de Neuchatel, on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2010

President of the Society Switzerland Bhutan, Mrs. Marianne Frei

Members of the Board

Members of the Society

Dear Friends,

First of all, I thank you very much for the kind invitation to address this General Assembly meeting of the Society. I am delighted to be with you, and to find among us today so many people that I know personally who have had life long association with Bhutan and whose interest and knowledge about the country are well know. I can see, among others, Mrs. Adrienne Oltrammare, Dr. Werner Kulling, Dr. Menzi, and Madame Montmollin. I am grateful for opportunity this meeting provides me, of reconnecting with old friends and to make new ones.

I am aware that you have had a long agenda in the morning session. And I am also aware that it is not a good idea to come in the way of your well-deserved lunch by making a lengthy speech. In any case, among a gathering of friends who are well informed and abreast of events in my country, I cannot be so presumptuous as to make any pronouncements on which you may be eminently more suited to talk about than me. Therefore, I will try to be brief and touch upon only a few topics, by way of an update only and thereafter, if time permits, we can engage in an exchange of views.

Let me first say that Friendship Associations have an important role in promoting better understanding and cooperation among peoples. In the case of Bhutan, with very few diplomatic embassies abroad, your role remains crucial.

As friends of Bhutan, a topic of interest may be how Parliamentary Democracy is doing, given that it was introduced only two years ago. I am happy to inform that it is doing very well. Democratic ideals, practices and institutions are taking firm roots in Bhutan. The present government is committed to ensuring the success of parliamentary democracy, to ensure that the principles and objectives of the Constitution are always safeguarded and that the rule of law is held paramount. Our Constitutional bodies including the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Office of the Attorney General and the Election Commission are being further strengthened in order to enable them to carry out their important mandates in the new political system. The National Assembly and the National Council are very active legislative

forums, with wide representation in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and educational background.

The media is rapidly growing and evolving into a dynamic force which is essential for an open and transparent society. A Media Foundation has recently been established by Royal initiative.

The Supreme Court will soon become functional as mandated by the Constitution and the Judicial Commission will appoint the Judges to the High Court.

All these political changes are the legacy of our visionary Fourth Druk Gyalpo. In addition to introducing democracy, he had also pioneered the concept of Gross National Happiness, which continues to be the guiding philosophy for our development efforts. The measured and holistic approach of GNH as we progress on the path of economic development is a Bhutanese wisdom that has served us well so far and will guide us equally well in the future. The main components of GNH include our efforts at environmental conservation, safeguarding our cultural heritage, ensuring good governance and in pursuing a robust and sustainable economic growth.

The present government continues to champion this philosophy, and GNH remains a cornerstone of their agenda. The government is taking steps to mainstream GNH by including it in school curricula and also incorporating it in economic policies. The government is also thinking carefully over its decision to accede to the WTO and a lot of debate is going on as to whether it is at all compatible with GNH.

In sum, the outlook for our future is bright and people remain optimistic that under the leadership of His Majesty the King, we are on the right track. His Majesty's compassion and selfless dedication for his people are deeply felt by everyone.

Turning to the excellent state of bilateral relations between Bhutan and Switzerland, let me remind you that Switzerland enjoys a special place in the hearts of the Bhutanese people. To paraphrase the title of the book you published last year, we may be far apart geographically, but we are close together in our hearts and minds. The people and government of Bhutan value our relationship with Switzerland and I can say that the feeling seems to be mutual, because among the Swiss people I meet, I find tremendous goodwill and friendship for Bhutan.

In terms of foreign relations, Bhutan has always followed a pragmatic approach, pursuing our national interests through careful choices in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy. We have as of now formal diplomatic relations with only 23 countries including Switzerland and only seven resident Embassies abroad, the latest addition being our Embassy in Brussels last year, which is headed by my predecessor, Ambassador Tobden who many of you know personally.

I thought you might also be interested to know that next month, from the 28th to 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010, Bhutan is hosting the 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit in Thimphu. It is for the first time that we are hosting the Summit in Bhutan and preparations are in full swing for its success. SAARC

leaders will deliberate on a wide range of issues and it is expected that they will come out with a consensus declaration on Climate Change, which has dramatic consequences for south Asian countries.

On a different note, I am really glad that this meeting is taking place at the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel which was the first to have a collection of Bhutanese Artifacts in Europe. I had meant to visit it for some time now and I am looking forward to seeing the collection afterwards.

Another event that I am looking forward to very much is the opening of the Dragon's Gift Exhibition on Bhutan at the Rietberg Museum in Zurich on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. I am confident that this event will serve to promote further understanding and appreciation of our ancient Buddhist heritage to the Swiss people. I am sure you must also be looking forward to it.

In conclusion, let me wish the Society Switzerland Bhutan all further successes in the years ahead. All of you are associated in some way or the other with Bhutan and I thank you for your continued interests in our country. And I urge to keep up your interests. On our part, the Embassy in Geneva remains at your disposal for any information, support or assistance that we may be able to provide you with.

I thank you once again and wish you all Tashi Delek.