

Country Statement for Bhutan by the Minister for Agriculture and Forests

Your Excellency Lyonchhoen Jigmi Yoezer Thinley, Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan

Your Excellency, Dr. Mahmud Hasan, State Minister for Environment of the Government of Bangladesh

Your Excellency, Mr. Hem Raj Tater, Minister for Environment, Government of Nepal

Honourable Secretary for Environment and Forests, Dr. Tishya Chatterjee, Government of India

Cabinet Ministers of the Royal Government of Bhutan

Excellencies

Dignitaries

Dashos

Representatives of International Organizations

Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to Thimphu and welcome to Bhutan.

Driven by a belief that we can make a difference in terms of adapting to climate change and thereby contribute to sustainable development, we agreed to come together. In August last year at Kathmandu, recognising that this region, the southern watershed of the eastern Himalayas spanning across the majestic mountains of Bhutan, India and Nepal and sprawling to the plains of Bangladesh and India; we agreed to address the four key issues of securing food, water, energy and ensuring biodiversity persistence in the face of climate change.

Our region, as we all know, is connected by the great rivers of the Ganges and the Bhrmaputra. They traverse the common landscape we call home. From the peaks to the plains, as mentioned earlier by His Excellency, the Honourable Prime Minister of Bhutan, the destinies and wellbeing of the people in our region are tied. It thus makes immense sense that we come together and address this collective challenge together.

The threats associated with climate change knows no boundaries. And it affects some of the most basic functions such as our ability to source water, grow food, light homes and enjoy the bounties of nature. The climate crisis cuts through the heart of our ability as a human race to pursue our dreams of sustainable and rational progress. And it will affect the wellbeing of our children and the ability of the next generation to provide for subsequent generations.

Recognizing this and appreciating the need to address these issues together and with immense support and goodwill, we had embarked on a journey that started in Kathmandu but did the rounds from Dhaka to Delhi to Kathmandu and ends here today in Thimphu. But in many ways, it is the beginning of a continuous process of engagement for a common cause.

We have agreed on a 'framework of cooperation' document; the implementation of which is backed by a declaration which will be signed shortly.

We have agreed to establish a 'Coordination Group' which will meet again in Thimphu within a year from today. The challenge now will be to effectively use the mechanism we have agreed upon to leverage funds and implement programs that will have far reaching benefits for all four partner countries.

Amongst us today we have representatives from a large range of international partners. There is broad appreciation for the Summit and a keen willingness to support the process. Given that we now have a mechanism in place, I urge all concerned to support the key areas of cooperation agreed to by all four countries.

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

We have a unique opportunity to start the process of making a difference for our present and future generations. But we can only do so if we go beyond the business as usual approach. Tackling a challenge as daunting as climate change, would require more than boardroom policies and laboratory research. It would need emotional and moral engagement, passion for thinking and acting out of the box at the level of every individual regardless of whether we are politicians, bureaucrats, scientists, industrialists or farmers.

I personally believe that this is not impossible if we think of the millions of lives that would be affected if we do not come together and start the process of putting in place effective adaptation measures to what appears to be an inevitable phenomenon. We need to think of the millions that would suffer from shortage of water, food and energy and result in hunger, malnutrition and poverty. We need to think of the thousands of lives that would be lost from climate induced disasters like flash floods, cyclones and windstorms. We need to think of all the infrastructures that would be destroyed and the consequent impact on our economy and way of life. We need to think for the tigers, the elephants, the birds, the plants and the insects that adorn our nature and maintain our ecosystems.

This is the start of a new beginning. We have the political will. We have an agreement to commonly forge ahead.

I believe we have created the foundation to create the right conditions for making a positive difference for the lives of millions in our sub-region.

Thank you and Tashi Delek!!!