

**Hon'ble Prime Minister Lyonchhen Jigmi Y Thinley**  
**Address at the Climate Summit for a Living Himalayas**  
**Thimphu Bhutan**  
**19th November, 2011**

Hon'ble heads of delegations, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of His Majesty the King, the people and the royal government of Bhutan, I take great pleasure in welcoming the distinguished delegations of the four countries of the South Eastern Himalayan Region to our very first climate summit. I am also happy to welcome the international participants and I thank them for their interest and willingness to support our initiative.

Until two days ago, we were gripped by the fear that our summit would take place under gloomy weather conditions. Our sky was overcast with rather unseasonable clouds bringing temperature down to levels that would have given skeptics of climate change reasons to cheer and claim that the world is in fact getting colder as they did at Cop 15 and 16, which were held under abnormally colder conditions. But sunny skies has returned to break the jinx over climate meetings and I cannot help but take as an auspicious sign that where the two world gatherings failed, we will succeed as friends and as neighbours.

What brings us together here in Thimphu in the high Himalayas is our determination to take on the biggest challenge mankind has ever faced. Climate change is threatening to erase all of man's achievement as a society. As species disappear progressively forever, mankind's own extinction is clearly a matter of time. We need to act decisively and urgently. Being located in perhaps the most fragile ecology on earth, we the countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal are distressed by the growing and devastating signals of climate change and its unthinkable implications for our people whose livelihood and indeed, survival are directly affected by this. Being on the southern slopes of the majestic Himalayas, our countries are connected by two of the world's mighty rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra. Ours is a region where ecological interconnectedness take heightened reality, diminishing highland forests and melting glaciers will affect the productivity and resilience of not only the source countries but the vast Indo-Bangla plains.

As such, our life and destinies are tied together. We are inspired by the belief that as a neighbourhood with shared perceptions and good neighbourly sentiments, we have the opportunity to find quicker solutions to our immediate problems through direct cooperation.

Even as we fully commit ourselves to the prolonged and ongoing negotiations at the international and regional level we want to act sooner than later. Since our agreement a year and a half ago to convene a summit here in Bhutan, it has been an inspiring journey. I am deeply encouraged by the reiteration and strong commitment from all my esteemed counterparts to the success of this endeavour during my recent meeting with them on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in the Maldives.

I am therefore confident that the heads of the distinguished delegates are fully empowered and prepared to take decisions as summiteers for our collective gain. It was certainly a matter of deep satisfaction to be informed that all the preparatory meetings in the various capitals and here in Thimphu have taken place in the most cordial and collaborative manner and this spirit has enabled us to reach agreements on all issues of the kind that would have been extremely difficult in larger and more divergent groups. These have given me reasons to look forward to today's summit being able to approve and adopt the framework for cooperation that will serve to guide and enable us in our individual and joint efforts to adapt to the climate change impacts in the four vital areas of water, food, energy and biodiversity.

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

The significance of our meeting and its outcome cannot be overstated. My delegation is convinced that the success of our initiative will not only have direct and immediate benefits for our own peoples but that we would be setting a worthy precedent for other countries that share similar conditions favouring such an approach. However, the answers to larger questions and issues of climate change, global warming and sustainability can only be found at the global level and through global consensus. After all, these are problems that transcend all national and regional boundaries and affect all of mankind.

While it is encouraging that discussions and negotiations on these subjects are taking place in numerous fora albeit with little success with the cop 17 unlikely to

yield any earthshaking results, our hopes are pinned on the Rio Plus 20 summit. It is at this event that every nation and region must be prepared to take an active and concerted part. I believe the fate of mankind and most certainly the pursuit of genuine human progress may very well be determined at this gathering, either through agreement or by our failure to agree. I, therefore, ask for your indulgence as I take this opportunity to share with you Bhutan's thoughts on how a universally acceptable solution might be found. These have been communicated to the secretariat of the Rio Plus 20 Summit in New York.

In June 1992, the leaders assembled in Rio De Janeiro and vowed to cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, restore and protect the health and integrity of the earth's eco-system. In order to achieve sustainable development, they further pledged to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. On the same occasion, the Rio partners adopted the landmark framework on convention of climate change whose declared objective was stabilisation of green house gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous, anthropogenic interference with the climate system. But regrettably, we have not been faithful to our commitments. Instead, we have perilously accelerated ecosystem decline.

In the 1990s, the carbon emission increased by an average 1.1 percent per year. Since 2000, they have increased by more than 3 percent per annum. The UN millennium ecosystem assessment based on the best and most comprehensive scientific evidence available concludes that two-third of the world ecosystem services are now in serious decline. We are all too familiar with reports on melting ice caps and receding glaciers, resource depletion, species extinction, ocean acidification, natural disasters, preventable disease, war, famine and more. And ecological footprint assessments show that humanity is now using up natural resources at a rate that is 35 percent faster than nature can regenerate. We know too that this ecological destruction is not separate from global economical realities that are increasingly dividing the rich and the poor, that 20 percent of the people consume 86 percent of the goods produced from a common heritage of natural resources and at great loss to the bio-diversity, while the poorest 20 percent consume just 1.3 percent. The richest 20 percent use 58 percent of all energy and the poorest 20 percent use less than 4 percent. 12 percent of the world's people use 85 percent of the world's water. 20 percent of the people produce 63 percent of the world's green house gas emissions while another 20 percent produce only 2 percent. The richest 20 percent consume 84 percent of all paper and have 87 percent of all vehicles, while poorest 20 percent use less than 1 percent of each.

The 20-year marker, the Rio-Plus 20, is certainly an appropriate historical moment to acknowledge that we cannot afford another 20 years on the same perilous trajectory. Business as usual is certain doom for the world, or at least for the habitability of the planet by human beings and most other species. So we take a brutally honest look at why we have been so shockingly incapable of implementing the aspirations of Rio 1992. In so doing, it becomes clear that a fundamental impediment to progress towards a sustainable way of life and true societal progress is that we have been measuring progress wrongly and that our prevailing yardsticks have been sending distorted and wrong signals to policy makers worldwide.

Our present GDP based measures in which economic growth is mistakenly synonymous with wellbeing literally report more fossil fuel combustion and therefore, more green house gas emissions as economic gain. The faster we decimate our forest and fish stocks, and the more voraciously we consume and deplete our resources, the more GDP grows. Even pollution, crime, war, sickness and natural disasters make GDP grow. Simply, because these ills cause money to be spent and GDP measures don't even help us to monitor progress against the Rio principle five that is on eradicating poverty as indispensable requirement for sustainable development because GDP can grow even as inequality and poverty increase. If we continue to measure progress in the same way then for another 20 years we will have destabilized our ecosystems to such an extent that human race and all other life forms would be faced with certain doom without any possibility of correction.

Ladies and Gentlemen

When the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 enshrined GDP as the global accounting system and created institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to regulate global economic systems, economists did not consider that the nature's capacity to support human economic activity might have limits. Not even the most renowned scientist knew that the human activity could change the climate of our planet let alone predict that climate change would one day become the greatest challenge facing humanity.

Today we know better. If we are to understand our failure to remove the key impediments to genuine and sustainable progress, it is the economic system itself at which we must take aim. We desperately need a new sustainability based economic paradigm with new progress measures, accounting systems and regulatory institutions if we are to avert greater and more frequent disasters and prevent the full collapse of our ecosystem. The time to do so has never been better

simply because the existing economic architecture is unraveling of its own accord. Analysts have written and I quote: “The world’s ecological debt comes due. No World Bank or IMF bail-out package will save the day.”

For the first time since the industrial revolution, it is clear that the next generation will not be better off than previous one; economically, socially and ecologically. And so we take stock of Rio Plus 20, the world must engage in a genuine search for cure. And it would appear that indeed the world may be ready to explore alternative paradigms. We have living examples of what can work, of sustainable production methods, appropriate technologies, communities that are not spiraling downwards into depression and fear but living prosperously and in harmony with nature and who are happy. On every continent there are outstanding models and best practices; organic farmers, sustainable foresters, community cooperatives and more, the seeds of the new economic paradigm.

We have well developed measurement systems of wellbeing with robust methodologies and reliable data sources including our own made in Bhutan ‘Gross National Happiness’ or GNH index with its nine domains and core indicators.

We have new accounting methods being developed by brilliant ecological economists that include robust measures of natural and social capital, measures that will enable us to move beyond the narrow GDP based indicators of the past to give us a much more comprehensive and accurate picture of our true wealth and progress.

A heartwarming sign that the world is at last ready to take that leap is the July 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on ‘happiness: towards a holistic approach to development’. Introduced by the Kingdom of Bhutan with support from 68 member states and unanimously adopted by the 193 member United Nations. Echoing the language of Rio 1992, this resolution acknowledges that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption will impede sustainable development. It urges a more inclusive, equitable, balanced approach to economic development to promote sustainable growth, happiness and well being of all peoples. In other words, the very recent UN resolution calls for precisely the holistic, humane policies and measures that must characterise the new sustainability based economic paradigm.

To this end, the Kingdom of Bhutan wishes to invite the nations, economists and ecologists of the world to come together in hammering out new international consensus on the same sustainability based global economic paradigm founded on the best available scientific and expert knowledge. We need to create sustainable

local economies that are not fueled by endless desire and simply producing and consuming more stuff but rather what people genuinely need in order to achieve decent living standards and to fulfill their human potential. The world already has enough in aggregate; in fact we have plenty of food, medicine, water, land and all we need to do is to shift our attention to creating more equitable arrangements for distribution and management to ensure that no one is deprived.

We need to adopt a full cost national accounting system, which will in all probability show us clearly that our economy is only as healthy as the ecosystem services and natural resources that sustain our life on earth and power our economy. This will make clear how by destroying our soils, forests, water and other natural wealth which provide invaluable and hitherto unaccounted services to society, our economy and our people will not survive. And so our national accounts will value our natural capital fully and properly account for the impacts of the economic activity on the nature's indispensable services. Based on such evidence, currently missing in our conventional accounting mechanisms the new sustainability based economic paradigm will create a sustainable economy and full harmony with nature. Dealing directly with the economic system in this way, dismantling the old and creating new consensus is the only way we will finally stem the deadly tide of climate change, resource depletion and ecological degradation.

It is the only way we can create a good and secure society based on sufficiency, equity, sustainability and dignity. We have no time to waste. If we are to ever celebrate human triumph in turning around our present suicidal course, then we must be begin to immediately create a new economic paradigm to take the value of natural capital, ecosystem services and social well being full into account and begin to chart a sane and sustainable path into the future.

Ladies and gentlemen

Bhutan is confident of this path which is fully in line not only with our ancient values, culture and wisdom traditions but with our largely pristine natural environment and with our new GNH based measures of progress. Within less than a year, we hope to be able to adopt full cost accounting on the basis of initiatives already being taken by our national statistical bureau. Indeed, we are determined to pursue the sustainable path as we have over 3 decades. But every nation is part of a much larger world bound together by a common future and fate. No single country can reap the benefits of adopting and implementing the new sustainability based economic paradigm unless all of humanity acts collectively and in harmony as one

community. Surely, our past failures and present will give us the wisdom to take or to make the right choice, to take the right path. On our part, the countries of the South Asian Himalayan Regions will have contributed through the outcome of this summit to building that wisdom and the global consensus that has eluded human society thus far.

Thank you and I wish you all happiness. Tashi Delek.