



Opening Statement
by
H.E. Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering, Hon'ble Minister for Foreign Affairs,
Royal Government of Bhutan,
to the Committee on
the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
(CEDAW),
at
UN Headquarters
New York, on 23rd July 2009

Commission and the National Commission for Women and Children are supported in this effort by a network of National Gender Focal Points in all sectors including the armed forces. Another important step is the devotion of an entire chapter on 'Women in Development' in Bhutan's 10th Five Year Plan for which a total outlay of Nu. 64 million has been allotted. A National Plan of Action for Gender has also been developed for the first time in Bhutan that highlights progress and identifies challenges in promoting and achieving gender equality in critical areas. The National Plan of Action for Gender is the reference document for all sectors in order to strengthen, consolidate, inform and guide efforts in our gender mainstreaming process.

Madam Chair,

6. Our government is fully committed to improving the status of women. We want to ensure that our culture of gender equality is preserved and strengthened and that any prevailing anomalies do not become accepted norms. We are determined to promote gender equality in economic, social and political spheres and efforts are being made to enable women participate actively in governance, business and in civil society.
7. On their part, women in Bhutan are continuing to assert themselves even more. Every year, there are larger numbers of women increasingly participating in all walks of life. Even in politics, which is one of the newest professions in Bhutan, there is encouraging response from women to participate in the political process.
8. Both political parties that stood for elections had women candidates and the total women representation in Parliament is 13.88%. This is a relatively low number, but this is not reflective of their actual participation in the political process. Of the total voter turnout of 79.4% during the last elections, women turned out in large numbers constituting 54.2% of the voters.
9. Women members of both political parties actively campaigned throughout the country and raised awareness of women's issues and encouraged them to participate in the political process. Encouraged by these trends which point to a greater readiness on women to assume a larger role in government, we are hopeful that these will lead to a significantly higher level of political participation by women in the future.
10. The government is fully committed to enforcing laws relating to women to safeguard the rights of women. Special efforts are already being made to enable greater female enrolment in all levels of the education system, especially at the secondary level, and in vocational schools, by improving awareness and sensitivity to their needs. We are also giving priority and devising strategies to lower early school drop-out incidence among girls.

11. The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) is the agency fully charged with the responsibility for the wellbeing of Bhutan's women and children. Established in 2004, it was granted full autonomy by the democratically elected government. The NCWC provides a forum for receiving and investigating violations of rights of children and women, besides coordinating, monitoring the implementing activities under the CRC, CEDAW and other conventions. The NCWC also ensures that Bhutan fulfills its regional and international obligations in the area of human rights.

Madam Chair,

12. While Bhutan is committed to the Convention, as a small, landlocked and least developed country, we are faced with many challenges. Financial constraints have impeded us from undertaking many more activities that could further improve the situation of our people. In addition, our harsh mountainous terrain and highly dispersed settlements continue to escalate our development costs and pose considerable challenges for the delivery of social services.
13. Within the financial and human resource constraints, we have invested our efforts to carry forward the recommendations with all sincerity in collaboration with relevant agencies, both government and NGOs, and with the cooperation of our development partners. We recognize that much remains to be done for which we are prepared to commit our efforts and resources in addressing existing challenges.

Madam Chair,

14. 2008 was a historic and significant year for Bhutan. It began with a smooth and successful transition to a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. This was followed by the Coronation of His Majesty the Fifth King. It concluded with the Centenary celebrations of the Institution of Monarchy under which Bhutan has enjoyed unprecedented peace and prosperity.
15. The elected government has repeatedly stated that its primary task is to lay down firm foundations for a sustainable and vibrant democracy that truly benefits every citizen. We strongly believe that democracy must be firmly rooted, irreversible and irreproachable. This is being done through empowering our people so that intellectually, socially, economically and politically, they have the capacity to realize their full potential. Therefore, the Committee can be assured that the political transformations in Bhutan are changes in the right direction and focus on women will continue to be strengthened.

Madam Chair,

16. Allow me to brief the Committee on the people in the camps in Nepal. As was submitted in our Report and List of Replies, the government is fully committed to finding a lasting solution to the problem through the bilateral process, based on agreements reached between the Bhutanese and Nepalese governments. However, the region continues to be unstable. With new governments in both countries, we are hopeful that the process will receive the necessary political support. Despite the difficulties, the channels of communication have always remained open with regular contact. We appreciate efforts of the Core Group of countries to resettle people from the camps. These initiatives will contribute towards resolving this humanitarian problem.

Madam Chair,

17. I would like to conclude by reiterating Bhutan's full commitment to the spirit of the Convention and to the achievement of its noble objectives. Our delegation looks forward to a constructive and positive dialogue with the honorable members of the Committee.

Thank You and Tashi Delek!