

13TH SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
ITEM 6: CONSIDERATION OF UPR REPORTS: ADOPTION OF THE OUTCOME FOR BHUTAN

Opening Statement by H.E. Ambassador Yeshey Dorji, Permanent Representative of Bhutan to
the UN in Geneva
18th March 2010

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Mr. President,

1. I am greatly honored to address the Human Rights Council on the occasion of the consideration of the outcome document of the UPR of Bhutan.
2. Bhutan has always taken a keen interest in the UPR Review mechanism since its inception. Along with other States, we recognize the UPR process as an excellent opportunity to undertake review of the human rights situation on the ground in all countries, in a constructive and cooperative spirit, and in a non-politicized manner. The principles of universality and non-selectivity are its strengths, drawing the support of all members of the international community. Bhutan remains committed to the success of the UPR mechanism.
3. On the 4th of December last year, Former Prime Minister Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji presented Bhutan's National Report to the Working Group of the Human Rights Council as the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister. He was supported by the Minister of Education and a high level delegation comprised of senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Office of the Attorney General, Gross National Happiness Commission, and the National Commission for Women and Children.
4. The conduct of the Universal Periodic Review was a productive and rewarding experience for Bhutan. It provided a valuable opportunity for critical self reflection on the human rights situation in the country, and allowed us to identify areas not only of strength and progress, but also where challenges and gaps persist. It also provided an opportunity to engage with all relevant government agencies as well as the civil society in a frank discourse on the human rights situation on the ground.

5. Bhutan's national report and overall preparations for the UPR was the product of an open and consultative process, involving stakeholders from both inside and outside government. At all stages, individuals, and interested groups within the country were invited to share with us their inputs and advice. We noted that this inclusive approach was appreciated by the Working Group in December, and we intend to pursue the follow up to the UPR in that same spirit of openness, transparency and partnership.
6. The interactive dialogue in the Working Group was particularly useful and constructive. We were gratified at the high level of interest and participation from delegations. We were satisfied to note that there was recognition of Bhutan's efforts, particularly of our holistic approach to development, guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, in the strengthening of the civil and political rights through the transformation of our system of governance, the further strengthening of the rule of law with the adoption of our first written Constitution and establishment and strengthening of new institutions such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Election Commission, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Supreme Court, and of the progress achieved in improving the lives of our people through sustained efforts to secure their economic, social, and cultural rights, as well as their right to development. At the same time, we received many comments and recommendations on areas where further progress could be made, including broadening the range of Bhutan's international human rights commitments, the strengthening of support to civil society organizations in the country, measures to combat domestic violence and trafficking, and on complex humanitarian issues. Bhutan remains committed to addressing all these issues.
7. Bhutan's UPR has served to reaffirm our conviction that human rights must be viewed in a holistic manner, that all human rights are indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. At the national level, there is greater appreciation of the equal importance of civil and political rights, and economic, social and cultural rights including the right to development. I might add that the UPR process thus far has imbued a sense of growing confidence among many national agencies involved in the protection and promotion of human rights, including the National Commission for Women and Children, the Women and Child Protection Units, and national NGOs who have appreciated the international community's support and encouragement for their work.
8. During the interactive dialogue Bhutan received a total of 99 recommendations. Some were challenging, but all were considered in a constructive spirit. Each of the recommendations has received careful examination. On our UPR delegation's return to Thimphu, the outcome of the Working Group's review along with the recommendations

were shared with all concerned agencies of the government, as well as with the public at large. All stakeholders were engaged in a process of extensive consultations.

9. As indicated by our delegation at the time of adoption of the UPR Working Group's outcome report in December 2009, the Royal Government's response to each of the recommendations have been transmitted to the OHCHR in writing, and is available as an official document. Although constrained in our responses by word limits, we are confident that we have provided comprehensive responses to each of the recommendations. My delegation would be pleased to provide further elaboration on any of these bilaterally, if any delegation so desires. As the Council may note, of the 99 recommendations that we received, Bhutan has accepted the vast majority of them, many of which are already under various stages of implementation. Of the remaining recommendations, we feel that while some are already adequately addressed by the existing provisions of our laws, we have taken note of the rest of them with explanations of our positions.

Mr. President,

10. I mentioned earlier that the UPR has allowed us to take a closer look at some of the persisting challenges and gaps faced by Bhutan in its efforts to meet its international human rights obligations. While through the UPR to date we recognize that no state is without deficits, as a small, landlocked, LDC, in the process of consolidating its political and institutional transitions, as recognized by so many members of this Council, ours require still greater effort and investment of already scarce resources. However, Bhutan is determined and committed to meeting these challenges, and we will continue to strive for further progress. The continued support and cooperation of the international community will be integral in this process, and we are grateful for that recognition during the course of our UPR.
11. With these remarks, I look forward to listening to the comments and views of the distinguished delegations and members of the civil society on the outcome of Bhutan's review.

I thank you, Mr. President.