

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. SONAM TSHONG, FOREIGN SECRETARY,  
AND LEADER OF THE DELEGATION, ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN  
AT THE MINISTERIAL SEGMENT OF THE 73RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION, BANGKOK, 17-19TH MAY 2017**

Hon'ble Chair, Prime Minister of Tuvalu,  
Madam Executive Secretary  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- A very good evening.
- I would like to begin my statement by paying homage to His Late Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, a monarch who was also much admired and loved in Bhutan.
- I congratulate His Excellency Mr. Enele Sopoago, the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Tuvalu on his election as the Chairman of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Commission. We take pride in this clear attestation that at ESCAP all member states big or small have an equal voice.
- At the Inaugural session yesterday, it was with much interest that I listened to the policy statement of Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Executive Secretary of our Commission. My delegation notes that even as ESCAP turns 70, the Commission continues to reform and reinvent itself to be fit for purpose, to serve the changing needs of the Asia Pacific region through this inclusive multilateral platform.
- I fully endorse her comment that ESCAP's normative work has helped to forge regional treaties, agreements and standards even as its analytical studies and reports have offered profound insights into emerging

challenges and opportunities. And yes, my country has benefitted over the years from the Commission's technical cooperation programs by way of policy advice and capacity building.

- ESCAP has advanced regional economic prosperity to eradicate poverty and inequalities through coordinated action. Bhutan appreciates the role of ESCAP as an essential arm of the UN system, providing international context to regional and national efforts. We also recognize the value of its convening authority, and ability to leverage that authority to foster policy discourse within the region.
- Perhaps these and more are the reasons why ESCAP continues to be one of the oldest and most trusted partners of all its member states.
- I was gratified to note that the Executive Secretary's report while rightly listing the dramatic improvements in the socio-economic progress of the region was also honest enough to recognize that most developing countries and in particular the countries with special needs do require special attention and resources from the international community. I have no doubt that ESCAP will continue to raise its voice for us.
- As we are now in the second year of implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, allow me to turn attention to one of ESCAP's current core area of work, namely supporting the region's realization of the SDGs.
- The Executive Secretary's report yesterday gave the region much optimism and reason to be satisfied with our socio-economic transformation. But a few reports emanating from the Commission also highlights several sobering data particularly relating to my region – South Asia.

- Our region accounts for 36% of the world's poor and nearly half of its malnourished children. It is only when South Asia overcomes these deprivations that the global achievements of the SDGs becomes global. In this regard, I commend the Report prepared by the Commission's South Asia Office which features several pertinent recommendations for implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development.
- Mr. Chair,
- Bhutan welcomes the Regional Road Map for Implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific - an instrument that brings our region to the forefront in supporting systematic follow up and reviewing implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Road Map will help strengthen regional cooperation on priority issues, coordinate effective international cooperation and foster exchange of best practices and mutual learning at the regional level. This is critical towards realizing a robust, voluntary, transparent and integrated follow up and review framework as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda.
- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development resonates well with Bhutan's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The integration of SDGs into the national planning process has been a near seamless process. All 17 goals with the exception of goal 14 i.e. life below water, are well captured in our 11th Five Year Plan which is due for completion in June 2018. At the target level, the Rapid Integrated Assessment conducted by UNDP in October 2015 showed that from the 143 targets relevant to Bhutan, 134 have already been integrated into the current Plan.
- We are currently in the midst of finalizing our 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (FYP) which will run from July 2018 to June 2023. Unlike the previous plans, the 12<sup>th</sup> FYP will be formulated using a set of 9 unique parameters also known

as the 9 domains of Gross National Happiness. These 9 domains of GNH are living standards, health, education, good governance, ecological diversity and resilience, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, time use, and psychological well-being. I am pleased to inform that 16 of the 17 SDGs seamlessly integrate with the nine domains and hence mainstreaming the SDGs into the national development plans has been smoothly carried out and the result shared with our development partners at a recently concluded round table meeting co-organized by the UNDP.

- When the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, our governments made the central pledge to leave no one behind. It was recognized that the litmus test for the success of this people centered, universally applicable and transformative agenda should be progress achieved by the weakest and the most vulnerable amongst us, including countries with special needs. It is therefore encouraging that at the start of the implementation phase of the SDGs, positive trends in the implementation of Integrated Program of Action has enabled 6 LDCs including Bhutan to meet the minimum graduation thresholds for the first time in 2015.
- While we consider this a major achievement, the reality is that the economic vulnerability continues to be a significant concern for LDCs on the graduation track including Bhutan. Vulnerabilities in terms of narrow economic base, over reliance on a single sector for revenue, threat of natural disasters and impacts of climate change, etc. remain significant concerns.
- Given the priority accorded by the Commission toward supporting countries with special needs, ESCAP can further support efforts of LDCs to prepare for graduation through technical and advisory services. While there have to date only been four cases of states that have exited the LDC list, my delegation considers that promoting knowledge exchange, best

practices, sharing of experiences between countries that have recently graduated and those that are on or close to the graduation track, with a focus on impacts of graduation, could be of particular value. This is something that my delegation urges the Commission to consider in its calendar of activities.

- Excellencies,
- The theme of ‘Regional Cooperation for Sustainable Energy’ is most relevant for it not only relates directly to SDG 7 but is also essential for the achievement of most of the other 16 SDGs as well. Indeed as the ESCAP Report on the theme states, the transition to sustainable energy is a cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. Our future prosperity and well-being hinges on the capacity to supply an increasing amount of energy that is affordable, accessible and reliable. And that energy, must be clean and sustainable.
- In that context, the formation by ESCAP of a Committee on Energy and Energy Division is an important step in focusing attention on this important area of regional cooperation, which we welcome.
- As a country committed to environmental protection, as a country that depends on its hydro resources for its prosperity and as a country that is vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change, Bhutan is fully committed to an energy transition towards clean and sustainable energy as a response to climate change. This is why we are determined to implement what we have committed under the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- Excellencies,
- Like in several sectors, regional and sub-regional cooperation to mobilize capacities, knowledge, technology and investment, as well as to establish regional markets greatly facilitates sustainable energy transition and is an important aspect of the transition to sustainable energy.

- However much we see the benefit of regional trade in energy, cross border trade in energy requires building of trust through political commitment, investment in infrastructure, the removal of institutional barriers and the normalization and harmonization of standards and regulations.
- In this regard, my delegation commends ESCAP in playing a support role in the promotion of a new architecture for regional energy governance by helping to build energy bridges, harnessing research and project development, and promoting legal and regulatory agreements for energy connectivity and we look forward to the second Asian and Pacific Energy Forum, to be held in 2018.
- In the case of Bhutan, energy is not only a driving force of change but through the sale of our electricity to India, it is also the single most important source of revenue for the country. Therefore regional trade in energy is a matter of high interest to us.
- I am most happy to inform that our bilateral cooperation with India in energy trade is win-win cooperation that many consider a good model for cross border trade in our region. Bhutan as a mountainous country has several rivers which can be harnessed to generate clean and sustainable electricity while India has the market, the technology and the resources to transform our hydro potential into electricity. Since the mid-1970s our cooperation in this sector has proved mutually beneficial.
- From a purely bilateral approach to energy trade, our sub- region is now on the verge of finalizing a trilateral trade in electricity among Bhutan, Bangladesh and India. This development I believe augurs well for the future of regional cooperation in energy.
- Thank You