

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY AMBASSADOR SONAM TOBAGY AT THE  
NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATION WITH BHUTANESE COMMUNITY ON 19  
DECEMBER 2021**

**Mr. David Smith, Federal Member for Bean; Friends of Bhutan in Australia;  
Distinguished Guests; and all Bhutanese community members in Canberra.**

The Bhutan-Australia Friendship began in 1962 when a Bhutanese delegation led by Ashi Tashi Dorji attended the Colombo Plan Meeting in Melbourne. Australia provided its full support for Bhutan to become a member of the Colombo Plan, as a result of which, many Bhutanese students received scholarships to study in Australia. Australia was also one of the first countries to welcome Bhutan to the United Nations in 1971. And in the past sixty years, Australia has been a good and close friend of Bhutan. It is due to the good relations between Bhutan and Australia that it has been possible for thousands of Bhutanese to come to this country to study and work.

Therefore, it was a historic occasion for Bhutan to also have the opening ceremony for our Embassy in Canberra two days ago coinciding with the National Day Reception. On the occasion, we were honored to have Mr. David Smith, Federal Member for Bean, as our Chief Guest, as well as senior officials of the Australian Government, members of the diplomatic community and Australian friends of Bhutan.

As you would all be aware, the COVID pandemic has adversely affected Bhutan. Our economic growth has slowed, our revenues have decreased and many people lost their jobs. Nevertheless, we had one exceptional factor that united Bhutan to

face the challenges of the pandemic. And that is the leadership of His Majesty The King!

His Majesty The King's leadership has been unparalleled in the world during this pandemic. His Majesty exercised leadership from the front. He visited all the vulnerable areas of the country regularly to ensure that not just every Bhutanese citizen, but every resident in Bhutan was safe and protected. It is due to His Majesty that Bhutan was one of the safest countries during the pandemic. His Majesty's magnanimous loan waivers and financial support also saved thousands of Bhutanese from serious economic hardship unlike what many people elsewhere faced. Such leaders rarely exist in the world. Therefore, the Bhutanese are indeed fortunate to be blessed with the exemplary leadership of His Majesty during these challenging times.

Despite the COVID pandemic and financial challenges faced by the country, His Majesty and the Government decided to open the Embassy in Canberra in view of two equally important reasons. The first is to take care and look after the welfare of all Bhutanese citizens living all over Australia and the Pacific, estimated to be 12,000 or more. And the second reason is to expand our bilateral relations with Australia.

It is, therefore, an honor for my colleagues and I to be given the important responsibility of establishing Bhutan's newest Embassy in Canberra to carry out these two important tasks. We are fully committed to assist and take care of the welfare of every Bhutanese citizen living in Australia and the Pacific region. You are welcome to visit or call the Embassy whenever you require our assistance, and we will do our best to help you.

I am delighted to inform you that the Embassy will be issuing passports in Canberra and we're currently working hard with the different agencies in Thimphu to make this possible by March 2022 or earlier. We will be the first among all our Embassies to be able to issue passports. Our website will also be up and running by January where all relevant information will be available.

For the Embassy to offer you better services and contact you during emergencies, our earnest request to every Bhutanese citizen in Australia is to register yourselves with the Embassy. You can do so through the Embassy website, by email, call us or in person.

Australia is now where we have the largest number of Bhutanese living abroad. And His Majesty and the Government consider each one of you as an invaluable asset to Bhutan. Through your hard work, you have not only achieved success for yourselves, but have helped and supported your families and communities in Bhutan. So even from far away, you are making meaningful contributions, and the success you have achieved in Australia makes everyone proud in Bhutan. In fact, any Bhutanese citizen doing well anywhere in the world is a source of pride for Bhutan. The hope and expectation of the Government is that you will continue to work hard and achieve even greater success. Your success also raises the good profile of Bhutan in Australia.

As the Bhutanese who are in Australia are highly qualified and capable people, the Embassy has already started discussions with some of you on how we can work together to not only benefit the community here, but also benefit Bhutan. For this, we will work closely and engage actively with the various Bhutanese Associations

in the different cities in Australia. In fact, the Embassy will welcome valuable ideas and suggestions from any of you. The Embassy is confident that together we will be able to do good things for our country. After all, as Bhutanese citizens who all love our precious country dearly, it is our responsibility to take care of Bhutan.

The Embassy's other request and appeal to you is that we must also be like one family - united and supportive of each other. As His Majesty has repeatedly reminded us, if we remain united, we will become stronger and we can overcome any challenge we face. And just as His Majesty and the Government deeply values each one of you, every Bhutanese citizen in Australia must also consider yourself as an integral part of Bhutan.

In this regard, I urge everyone to listen to or read His Majesty's address to the nation on National Day as it is relevant for every Bhutanese citizen. For us in Australia, most of whom have come to study and train, a relevant message from the Royal address is regarding skilling, up-skilling and re-skilling, and pursuing a culture of life-long learning, so you always have the necessary competencies to succeed. Therefore, I encourage you to always look for opportunities to enhance your skills. Because this will guarantee that you get better jobs anywhere and you always remain relevant.

My last request and appeal to every Bhutanese in Australia is to respect the laws of Australia and not undertake any unlawful activities. Actually, the Embassy was delighted to learn from the authorities here that the Bhutanese are one of the most law-abiding residents in Australia. So, please keep it up. You must also help the Embassy in strengthening the relations between Bhutan and Australia. You must make as many Aussie friends as possible as it is the friendships that will greatly

contribute to strengthening the relations between Bhutan and Australia. And do your best to always promote Bhutan in Australia.

While I am the official Ambassador of Bhutan to Australia, each one of you, in your own ways, must also be an Ambassador for Bhutan in Australia.

I look forward to meeting and interacting with each one of you and wish you all a Happy New Year!