

**STATEMENT BY BHUTAN AT THE SIXTH SESSION
OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT, UN-ESCAP
9-10 December 2020**

Distinguished Delegates

1. I would like to thank UN-ESCAP and the Secretariat for convening this meeting and for the insightful reports and documents to help us in our deliberations.
2. The meeting programme and the documents provide us an update on the various environment challenges that our region continue to grapple with. And these challenges are aggravated further by the COVID 19 pandemic. Countless lives and livelihoods have been affected, millions have lost jobs and economies have come to a standstill. We have been dealing with multiple shocks from both the COVID-19 pandemics and the existential threat of climate related impacts. The world's poorest and most vulnerable among the hardest hit. Global and common environmental challenges, such as climate change and the current pandemic, only serve to remind us that in an interconnected world, our approach to development must be holistic.
3. The link between environment and development and the work undertaken by this Committee therefore remains key in our pursuit of SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
4. Bhutan is a small, least developed and landlocked developing country. We have immense development challenges. However, finding the right balance between the pursuit of socio-economic development and protection of our environment has been at the heart of our development approach based on the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness.
5. We have pledged to remain carbon neutral and our constitution requires that we maintain a forest coverage of at least 60% of the land. Today, our forest coverage stands at 72.6% forest cover, which not only serve as a carbon sink for greenhouse gas emissions but also provide valuable ecosystem services.
6. The fact that today, we have been found eligible for graduation out of the LDC category by the Committee for Development Policy in 2018 for the second time within a rich environment intact stands testimony of our approach to development.
7. But despite all our efforts, we are victims of the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather phenomena, increase frequency of natural disasters, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), flash floods, windstorms and landslides pose present and real danger. Climate change makes extreme weather events more frequent and more intense. Now, because of the pandemic, they come at a time when national economies are crashing and ordinary people are stretched to their limits.
8. Waste management and water issues poses serious problems. Climate change is an existential threat, that cannot be denied.

9. The 12th Five-Year National Development Plan (2018-2023) is critical as it is Bhutan's last plan as an LDC and will serve as our transition strategy for graduation. Efforts during the period will focus on consolidating past progress and addressing the remaining last mile challenges - to build a strong foundation for a vibrant, resilient and sustainable economy towards achieving SDGs. However, we are extremely concerned with the extreme impacts of the COVID which has significant and long-lasting repercussions for communities, agriculture, markets and sustainable development.
10. That said, Bhutan remains committed to uphold its 2009 commitment to remain carbon neutral and reaffirms its pledge to fulfilling its commitments to the Paris Agreement for Climate Change.
11. To conclude, the pandemic is rolling back decades of progress on poverty, gender and health, progress. However, the pandemic gives us an opening to recover better. We now have **a tremendous once-in-a-lifetime window of opportunity for genuinely transformative green recoveries to deliver stronger climate, sustainability, health and economic outcomes**. Countries must be mindful of indiscriminate increased developmental pace post COVID and remind ourselves in turning around from our unsustainable consumption and production patterns.
