STATEMENT

BY

Mr. RINCHEN WANGDI,
GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS COMMISSION,
ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF BHUTAN

AT THE

BEIJING, 27 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER
Madam Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years into our commitment to the Ten years of Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022, we meet here today in the beautiful city of Beijing. The sole purpose of our mechanism is to discuss ways to empower persons with disabilities so that they may enjoy their rights to fully and equally participate in society. In this respect, we have adopted goals of the Incheon Strategy through observing the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities. So in this meeting, we are to review the progress made in achieving the targets thus far and to decide on the next course of action.

I am pleased to participate in this important meeting and, on behalf of my delegation, would like to reassure Bhutan’s full commitment, co-operation and active participation in this process. I also take this opportunity on behalf of the Bhutanese delegation, to thank the people, the Government of the People’s Republic of China, China Disabled Persons’ Federation, and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), for the generous hospitality extended to us since our arrival and for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting.

Madam Chairperson,

Even though Bhutan has a very small population of about seven hundred thousand people, we have an estimated 3.4 per cent of the population living with disability as per the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan (PHCB) 2005., the figure will be updated soon after the finalization of the 2017 Population and Housing Census report.

to old age and other factors. Additionally, the World Report on Disability (WHO & World Bank, 2011) identifies 15% of the world’s population as consisting of people with disabilities, with the number of disabled persons still continuously growing.
For Bhutan, inclusive development has always been an underlying principle for all of Bhutan’s development polices and plans. It is also reflected in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The wellbeing of all the people of Bhutan, including those with disabilities, has always featured as a primary goal in all its development plans and polices.

However, Bhutan is faced with several challenges in implementing disability related programmes and projects. Bhutan has only made moderate progress towards disability inclusive development. Some of the challenges that we are currently faced with are - financial resources, difficult geographical terrain and a lack of awareness due to illiteracy in many areas.

Bhutan has very little information on the disabilities. The data that is available on disability is fragmented and collected by different agencies for their own consumption. Bhutan is yet to establish a comprehensive data collection strategy and process by the central government.

The data collected on disability by different agencies are not comparable or consistent with the international practice.

The recent survey conducted by ESCAP on the midpoint review, to collect baseline data for the Incheon Strategy indicators in preparation for this meeting, has informed us on the lack of data especially disaggregated by sex. There is clearly a need for Bhutan on building data collection system, process and capacity for disability.

Bhutan, however, in the recent Housing and Population Census 2017 was able to incorporate Washington Group questions to find out the prevalence and percentage of population with disability. While the Housing and Population Census report is yet to be finalized we are working with National Statistical Bureau on the data collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated disability data for evidence-based policy making.

While the government has been pursuing inclusive development, it still faces various challenges in meeting all the needs of the people with disabilities. These challenges arise due to competing development priorities in the face of limited resources.
Despite concerted efforts it has been found that persons with disability are one of the vulnerable groups and there is need to improve the policy and legal environments to improve their situation and empower them.

Bhutan as of today does not have an overall national disability policy to guide all the programmes and activities of different agencies and sectors of the government, the Incheon strategy with its’ 10 goals, 27 targets and 62 indicators has in a big way provided strategic guidance to different sectors to plan and implement their activities.

The Royal Government of Bhutan, is currently undertaking an assessment on the ratification of the convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities and has started consultation with stakeholders and other government agencies.

The Royal Government of Bhutan, recognizing the need for proper coordination amongst various sectors and has designated the Gross National Happiness Commission (GNHC), which functions as the Central Planning Agency, as the focal agency for disability. As such, the GNHC is entrusted in ensuring, promoting and upholding the rights of persons with disabilities and in promoting the inclusion of disability dimensions in the development agenda beyond 2015 in diverse sectors.

The GNH Commission is now in the process of drafting the National Policy for Persons with Disability. The draft policy has taken into consideration the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability and the goals of Incheon Strategy. The GNH Commission has also taken up the lead role in coordinating all the programmes and activities related to disabilities in all government sectors.

The GNH Commission has also incorporated the disability into the development plans by including disability related indicators for relevant national key result areas of the 12th Five Year which will cover the period 2018-2023.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming Bhutan’s commitment to the vision of ensuring a disability-inclusive post 2015 development agenda through implementation of Incheon strategy
and we assure you of our continued support in the processes involved in realizing our goal, and Making the Right Real for the People with Disabilities in the Asia and the Pacific.

Thank you!