Good Morning and Kuzu zangpo.

It is indeed a privilege for me to lead the delegation of the Royal Government of Bhutan to the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on the Beijing+25 Review.

I am Kunzang Lhamu, Director of the National Commission for Women and Children, Royal Government of Bhutan and with me are officials from the Royal Government of Bhutan, Civil Society and the Royal Bhutanese Embassy, Thailand.

As we reflect on the achievements since our commitments in 1995, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has made significant progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA). Substantial progress has been made in creating a conducive legal and policy environment to promote the rights of women and girls. The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) was established in 2004 as the nodal gender machinery in the government to promote and protect the rights of women and children in Bhutan.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, articulates the State’s commitment to uphold the fundamental rights of all citizens and eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and children and also recognizes ratified international treaties like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as deemed law of the country. Specific legislations like the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013, the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 and the Child Adoption Act 2012 were also enacted.

Bhutan has always had strong political will when it comes to women’s rights and gender equality. Ratification of the CEDAW and CRC and being party to the BPFA indicates our commitment in empowering our women and girls. A royal decree from His Majesty the Fourth King in 1998 to encourage women’s participation in governance and the National Assembly is testimony of the political will from the highest that has always existed.

Gross National Happiness (GNH) is integral to Bhutan’s development process. GNH strives to include every man, woman and child in the stages of development. Besides, every policy in Bhutan
is mandatorily screened from a GNH perspective through the use of the GNH Screening Tool, which has gender equality as one of the parameters.

While Bhutan continues to strengthen its efforts to achieve gender equality, the National Five Year Development Plans starting from the 11th Plan in 2013-2018 mainstreamed gender with a dedicated National Key Result Area (NKRA). This is a huge positive shift to ensure stronger results and outcomes. The 12th Plan followed a two-pronged approach to women’s empowerment and gender equality with a dedicated NKRA and mainstreaming gender across several other NKRAs. Recognizing that women play a pivotal role in natural resource management and also considering the differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men, under NKRA 6 the 12FYP includes gender responsive interventions in climate change actions and we are currently carrying out an assessment of gender and climate change adaptation and mitigation in three sectors; namely waste, agriculture and energy.

Bhutan stands committed to uphold and implement the 2030 agenda on then Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and is committed to achieving the stand-alone goal on gender equality. I am proud to report that the 12th Five Year National Development Plan has been aligned to the SDGs. The Gross National Happiness Commission has been spearheading the incorporation of the SDGs and indicators in the 12th FYP.

Thus, in keeping with international commitments and to promote happiness through development values, ‘DEWA - Dashboard to Enhance the Wellbeing of All’ is one such initiative envisaged as an integrated data and visual system to collect relevant data on GNH, SDG and FYP indicators and serve as a monitoring tool for all development programs and activities in the country.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

To highlight a few remarkable achievements related to the BPfA, significant progress has been made in improving the livelihoods of the poor, especially the vulnerable groups. The proportion of population living under poverty reduced from 31.7% in 2003 to 8.2% in 2017 and the poverty rate for female headed households reduced by around 21% for the same period.

Similarly, considerable progress has been made in achieving health and education indicators. The institutional delivery has increased from 19.8% in 2000 to 93.4 percent in 2017. The Maternal
Mortality Rate reduced from 225 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 89 in 2017. The Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) reduced from 60.5 in 2000 to 15.1 in 2017 and the Under Five Mortality Rate from 84 in 2000 to 34.1 in 2017.

On the education front, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for basic (PP-X) and secondary level (VII-XII) stands at 1.03 and 1.10 respectively in 2019. The GPI for tertiary education has increased from 0.81 in 2017 to 0.86 in 2019.

The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) Bill is in the process of being drafted after the Cabinet approved the Concept Note in May 2019. This is expected to provide a strong legal framework for the NCWC as the nodal agency for the protection and promotion of the rights of women and children. Similarly, to provide an overarching and coherent strategic framework of the government’s priority towards gender equality, the draft National Gender Equality Policy and the National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (NPAGE) has been submitted to the Cabinet for approval.

To sum up, the Royal Government of Bhutan has undertaken a number of measures to improve women’s rights and gender equality in the country. However, a number of challenges still remain ahead of us and we are well aware of these remaining gaps. Therefore, we will continue our efforts to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Finally, I would like to underline that the Royal Government of Bhutan remains determined to comply with its international commitments and remain an active player in promoting women’s rights at the national, regional and international levels.

Thank You for your attention. Tashi Delek!