Statement by Bhutanese delegation
Agenda item 3 (b) - Gender Equality and reproductive health and rights

Mr. Chairman
Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. Women in Bhutan comparatively enjoy high degree of independence and equal opportunities as that of men in many spheres of life including right to own properties and decision making. Women also have equal rights before the law as guaranteed by the Constitution.

2. Further, gender equality and empowerment of women and girls have been recognized as an important cross cutting theme of socio-economic development in the five year development plans and significant efforts have been made to enhance the policy and legislative environment for the achievement of gender equality over the past years.

3. The National Health Policy requires comprehensive quality maternal and child health care services to be provided.

4. The Royal Government made substantial investments in the reproductive health and family planning services to have a health population growth leading to reduction of maternal mortality rate from 89 per 100,000 live births in 2017 from 255 in 2005. This is close to the SDG target 3.1 of reducing global MMR to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030.

5. Further, in 2017, 97.2 percent of the births were attended by health professionals compared to 50.9 percent in 2005. Institutional delivery rates have increased to 93.4 percent in 2017. Contraceptive prevalence rate has improved and knowledge on contraceptive method that could prevent or delay pregnancy stands at 96.3 percent.

6. In addition, allow me to share some of the some of the major initiatives:
   a) In order to reduce sexually transmitted diseases availability of condoms has been increased through condom vending machines. Inter-personal communication has been strengthened for advocacy and awareness.
   b) A web based mother and child tracking system has been instituted to track each pregnant woman and child till her child attains five years of age.
   c) Early Essential Newborn care and Kangaroo care is introduced and implemented to improve the health of the new born.
   d) Additionally, the Health Ministry has initiated measures of improving accessibility to care including the establishment of adolescent friendly health units in hospitals and deployment of female health workers in all the BHUs in the country.
e) The construction of a 150 bedded Gyaltsuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child care hospital is underway with the objective to improve the quality of mother and child care.

7. However, despite these remarkable achievements, there are still gaps that need to be addressed. The prevalence of sexual activity is high among adolescents and comprehensive sexuality education in schools is low. Violence against women and girls remains prevalent. Further, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases infections in the country is on the rise. Therefore, enhancing provision of high quality sexual and reproductive health information and services for adolescents and youth is key to ensuring continuous progress.

8. Going forward, Bhutan is committed to realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 12th Five Year Plan (2018-23) will be the first major step towards implementing the Sustainable Development Goals including health and gender related goals. The 12th FYP is well aligned with the SDGs emphasizing on leaving no one behind.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.