

**STATEMENT BY HON'BLE MINISTER LYONPO LEKEY DORJI,  
MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS, ROYAL GOVERNMENT OF  
BHUTAN**

**at the**

**Regional Workshop**

**On**

**Opportunities and Challenges in Using Evidence-based Trade  
Policy for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals**

**15-17 June 2016**

**Hotel Namgay Heritage, Thimphu**

Distinguished Guests,  
Eminent Resource Persons,  
Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Today is a very auspicious day for us Bhutanese. It is the Birth Anniversary of Guru Rimpoche, known as the “Precious Master”. He is highly revered as the founder of the vajrayana Buddhism and Buddha of our time.

It is a great honor and privilege for me and my Ministry, to welcome all distinguished the participants and the resource persons to this important **Regional Workshop on “Opportunities and Challenges**

**in Using Evidence-Based Trade Policy for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” on this very auspicious day.**

We have participants from eight countries in the region, including Bhutan and a team of qualified and extremely talented Resource Persons. We are indeed very happy to have you in Bhutan and I hope that you will have an enjoyable stay.

The Ministry of Economic Affairs is pleased to host this workshop in collaboration with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). We would like to thank the UNESCAP, particularly Dr Mia Mikic, Head of Trade Policy and Analysis Section, Trade and Investment Division of the UNESCAP for presenting us the opportunity to host this important capacity building workshop.

I gather, that the main objective of the workshop, is to enhance the capacity of the least developed and landlocked developing countries in collection and use of data to support the holistic and evidence-based trade policy making to achieve the SDGs.

### **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development & the GNH**

In September 2015, at the Sustainable Development Summit in New York, world leaders unanimously adopted the “Transforming Our

World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It is the 15 year global plan of action to end poverty, reduce inequalities and protect environment.

In essence, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to advance economic and social development and environmental sustainability in tandem; and it recognizes the interdependence of human wellbeing and healthy ecosystems.

I am delighted to mention, that this concept, is not new to Bhutan. Since the 1970s, under the enlightened leadership and patronage of our Benevolent Kings, Bhutan's development is guided by the principle of “Gross National Happiness (GNH)” that strives to balance material and spiritual advancement through - sustainable socio-economic development; preservation of tradition and culture; conservation of environment; and good governance. We strongly believe that focusing on happiness was a holistic approach to development that improved the well-being of people by balancing material growth with social inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.

The UNDP country Office in Bhutan found that, out of the 169 SDG targets, 134 are already reflected in Bhutan’s policy frameworks. Further, an assessment of Bhutan’s legal and policy framework against SDG targets showed a high level of integration between the

SDG targets and the country's laws, regulations, policies and plans. This simply illustrates the philosophical alignment between our development framework of GNH and the principles of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

## **Role of Trade**

Bhutan as an LDC, is cognizant of the fact, that trade is an indispensable driver of sustainable development; and that, it lies at the heart of unlocking our potential towards addressing the challenges of economic growth, poverty, and wellbeing. Bhutan supports the need to address the special needs and vulnerabilities of the least developed and landlocked countries in all these areas and recognizes the fundamental role of trade in advancing the SDGs.

For Bhutan, trade is central to economic growth and national development, pursued within the overall development framework of GNH. Bhutan continues to put in place enabling regulatory and policy instruments including the institutional structures to enhance economic growth; through diversification of economic base with minimal ecological footprint; value addition and management of natural resources in a sustainable manner; increasing and diversification of exports; enhancement of productivity; and promotion of Bhutan as an organic brand. We recognize and uphold the importance of **transparency and predictability of trade** policies, regulations and

procedures as an essential element for economic growth and development.

For the LDCs, including Bhutan, trade has been an engine of economic growth and a source of financial and non-financial means for development. The role of trade features prominently across 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. SDGs seek to ensure that trade plays its part in boosting growth, tackling poverty and promoting sustainable development. There are about 20 targets under different SDGs that are related to international trade. It treats **trade as “an engine for economic growth and poverty reduction”** and a means to achieve inclusive and sustainable development in the coming decades.

### **Importance of Evidence-based Trade Policy**

Nevertheless, **how trade is managed and the trade policy crafted will be crucial to the achievement of this new agenda for sustainable development.**

In the developing world, most often, we the policy-makers depend on intuition, beliefs or conventional wisdom – or at best, theory. In some cases, powerful economic interests, dominate the policy-making process. This is not by choice, but due to lack of capacity and technical human resources to effectively deal with trade-related

issues, which are diverse and evolving. Further, the lack of co-ordination among governmental agencies is a common problem faced by all. A specific manifestation of that, is the lack of regular and timely information flow on trade issues to all concerned.

To maximize the benefit of the limited resources and achieve greater growth, it is about time that we enhance our capacity and put in place evidence-based trade policies. One of the main challenges that I foresee is to intelligently prioritize the SDG goals and come up with innovative programmes to achieve these goals, against the backdrop of limited resources and lack of appropriate data and statistics.

With the assistance of development partners, many LDCs including Bhutan, have acquired useful knowledge and expertise on many trade-related issues. However, given the complex and evolving nature of the issues involved, important knowledge gaps, still exist.

In this regard, capacity building on “Evidence-Based Trade Policy for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals” is timely and fitting. We are hopeful that this workshop would meet the expectations, and contribute towards achieving its objective in enhancing the capacity and competence of the participants.

I am optimistic that the expertise, knowledge and vast experiences of the eminent resources persons, in the field of evidence-based trade policy-making, would far exceed the expectations of the participants.

I would like to once again thank Ms Mia Mikic and the UNESCAP for their continued support and kind cooperation; and for choosing Bhutan to be the host for this important workshop. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with UNESCAP in future.

In conclusion, I would like to wish, all the resource persons and the participants an enjoyable stay and a fruitful training session for the next three days.

Thank You and Tashi Delek!