

Remarks by Hon'ble Lyonchhen at the Concluding Session of the 16th Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Thimphu, 29 April, 2010

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

It was a singular honour and privilege for the Royal Government of Bhutan, and for me personally, to welcome Your Excellencies to Thimphu for the 16th SAARC Summit. I hope that your stay here has been pleasant and comfortable and worth the arduous journey you undertook to get here.

Our deliberations of the past two days have been most instructive and productive. My task as the Chair was made easy by your wisdom and sagacity and your unstinted cooperation. We have just adopted the "Thimphu Silver Jubilee Declaration – Towards a Green and Happy South Asia". The title embodies the spirit and vision laid out in the SAARC Charter by our founding fathers twenty five years ago. The contents reflect our yearning for a peaceful, prosperous and happy South Asia. Our decision to develop a "Vision Statement" by a "South Asian Forum" is one of the most significant achievements of this Summit. It is a matter of satisfaction that the forum will consist of eminent personalities from diverse backgrounds from our region and beyond. The forum will provide a platform to debate, discuss and exchange ideas on South Asia and its future development.

The choice of Climate Change as the theme for the Summit was most appropriate. We were able to have in-depth discussions on one of the most challenging issues of our times. The Thimphu Statement on Climate Change that we adopted will provide a strong impetus to our collaborative efforts to address the issues relating to Climate Change, at the national, regional and international levels.

I am glad that our Foreign Ministers earlier today signed two very important instruments, namely, the Convention on Cooperation on Environment and the Agreement on Trade in Services. These instruments will help forge closer cooperation in their respective areas.

The operationalization of the SAARC Development Fund and the appointment of its First Chief Executive Officer yesterday was an important achievement. Our goal of establishing a regional fund for financing regional and sub-regional socio-economic development programmes and projects has now been fully realized. It is our duty to support the fund so that it can deliver on its important mandate. Bhutan as the host country will provide all possible support to the SDF Secretariat.

Another milestone achieved by the Summit is operationalization of the South Asian University in New Delhi. The University when it opens in August is destined to become the Centre of Excellence for Higher Learning in South Asia to which the brightest minds from the region will converge.

Excellencies,

Time does not permit me to list all the important decisions that we have taken during the past two days. But I can say with confidence that these decisions have set the stage for SAARC to enter a new era twenty five years after its founding. The outcome of our Summit should have a

reinvigorating effect on the SAARC process. It should enable the organization to become more resilient and relevant, and be a beacon of hope for the people of South Asia. The true test of the success of this Summit, however, lies in the difference the decisions will make to the lives of the millions of the poor and deprived in our countries. We, therefore, need to be focused and act on the decisions. We have to provide continuous leadership to all those engaged in carrying forward the process of regional cooperation.

I was deeply encouraged by our discussions at the Retreat. I sensed in us a strong commitment to SAARC and confidence in the Association's ability to deliver and become a more effective regional instrument. During my chairmanship of this august body, I will strive to ensure that the momentum generated by this Summit is maintained and the year ahead is a successful one. Towards that end, I will rely on your continued wisdom, guidance and support.

Before I conclude, I would like to thank the Summit for allowing the Royal Government of Bhutan the opportunity to introduce the concept of Gross National Happiness which has guided Bhutan's development philosophy for over three decades. I am confident that the intergovernmental workshop to be organized later in the year will be able to take an informed view of the relevance of this concept in our region.

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank all delegations for your support in making this Summit a successful and memorable event. Your gracious presence in Thimphu will be deeply cherished by the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan. I wish you all health and happiness and bon voyage.

TASHI DELEK.