



Statement by
Hon'ble Dasho Rinzin Dorji,
Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests
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Your Excellency, Lyonpo Yeshey Penjor, Minister of Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and Chairman of 35th APCR

Distinguished Head of Delegations,

H.E. Mr. Qu Dongyu, The Director General, FAO

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings from the Land of Gross National Happiness.

At the outset let me extend a very warm welcome once again to all. It is indeed an honour to host this very important 35th APCR in Bhutan. I on behalf of the Royal Government of Bhutan and on own my own behalf would like to thank the member countries and FAO for providing the opportunity to host in Bhutan.

Most of the countries, including Bhutan is going through huge difficulties due to COVID19 pandemics. Despite these difficulties, recognizing the importance of this regional event, Bhutan decided to host the 35th APCR virtually. This is to indicate Bhutan's solidarity to our member countries. We all agree that the FAO has been playing a vital role in supporting the countries in agriculture and food supply chains and also in building capacities of the member countries to overcome the challenges faced by the countries.

The Asia and Pacific region have most diversity in terms of population and natural resources endowment. Yet, we face the most daunting challenges due to poor economy of our countries. Furthermore, our challenges are exacerbated by impacts of climate change, such as, the rapid melting of glaciers causing GLOF in the mountains to storms and sea level rise causing floods in the plains and islands.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

In Bhutan, Agriculture plays an important role employing 57% percent of population, contributing around 16% to GDP. Despite its importance, arable land is only 7.8% and only 3% is cultivable. Some of the most challenging tasks are the rugged terrain, small landholding (average holding 1.2ha), low volume, lack of aggregation and value addition, and lack of market information. Agriculture is also characterized by high labour costs with lesser youth participation.

The challenge now and in the future is that we need to produce more food, but our farming communities are increasingly seeing out migration of youth and feminization of agriculture.

Bhutan is also a victim to climate change, a problem that we had little part in creating, yet we bear the brunt of its adverse effects. Being a land locked country with a fragile mountain environment, Bhutan remains vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Bhutan faces increasing threats from climate hazards and extreme events such as flash floods, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF), windstorms, forest fires and landslides. All these poses challenge in producing enough food to feed the growing population with diet diversification for balanced nutrition.

Sustainable development has long been recognized in Bhutan as the way forward to a secure, peaceful, and happy future. We have aligned our development plans towards achieving “climate resilient and carbon neutral development”. Bhutan have committed to maintaining at least 60% of our land under forests for all times. Currently, our forest coverage stands at over 70%.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

The COVID19 pandemic has further fueled our difficulties. The COVID19 added to our wave and the consequent economic crisis has generated new priorities. COVID-19 has direct implications on the agriculture and food systems and economic capacity of countries, particularly countries with a low level of economic development suffer most from the pandemic. We believe that the FAO with huge pool of experts and network is well positioned to plan and support the countries and help with mid-to long term impacts of COVID-19.

Therefore, we foresee the huge task of FAO. Bhutan would like to see FAO strengthening the effort for identifying ways to support and facilitate the access of the resources more rapidly. Furthermore, FAO should specify and work on provision of technical and technological support. The support in meeting needs of the countries including new knowledge, technologies and skills will also help in fulfilling the SDG goals and targets. As such, FAO needs to place greater importance to this region to translate our common goals into tangible actions at the regional and national level.

I am happy to inform this August gathering that the FAO has been an important partner in accomplishing our goal of Gross National Happiness through rural poverty reduction, food security, agriculture diversification and environment protection. The FAO Office in Bhutan has been playing tremendous role but due to limited staff strength and its mandates, the FAO Bhutan office is highly challenges. Therefore, we feel the current FAO office must be upgraded to full fledged office with FAO Resident Presentative.

Before, I conclude I want to express our happiness with all member countries attendance to the 35th APRC. Our attendance here for this important event is a

living testimony of importance the government's and non-government agencies in the region accorded to the event.

Lastly, I am confident that together we can resolve all the food and agriculture problems faced by our countries. With this, let me wish great success on the partnership between FAO and regional countries and look forward for continued participation, cooperation and commitments for the common good of our humanity.

THANK YOU AND TASHI DELEK !