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Statement by His Excellency, Dasho Nado Rinchen,
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at

the Fourth Session of
the Conference of Parties to
the United Nations Framework Convention on
Climate Change.

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Madam President, Maria Julia Alsogaray, Secretary of Natural Resources and Sustainable Development, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to convey the greetings and good wishes of His Majesty the King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck to this august gathering. At the outset, Madam President, I would like to offer my congratulations on your election as President of this Conference. We are indeed fortunate to have a person of your high caliber and vast experience presides over this meeting. My delegation, Madam President, is touched by the hospitality extended to us by the government and people of Argentina.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to His Excellency, Minister Ohki of Japan for his excellent leadership as President of the Third Session of the Conference of the Parties. Let me also place on record our appreciation to the Executive-Secretary Mr. Michael Zammit Cutajar and his Secretariat for their excellent technical and logistic support.

Bhutan believes that the Parties of the Convention have made considerable progress through the adoption of a legally binding protocol to combat climate change. We must now live up to our common commitments. We look forward to the establishment of modalities for policies and measures and flexibility mechanisms to strengthen the Kyoto Protocol.

My country has been participating actively and constructively in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) negotiations during the post-Kyoto period. Despite advances made in Kyoto, this session of the Conference of the

Parties must elaborate how the CDM shall equitably govern. These transactions should specifically result in an equitable distribution of benefits to project partners and should not become a means by which developed countries shift their responsibility for domestic reductions to developing countries.

Bhutan is fully committed to fulfilling our obligations. We are preparing our National Communication with financial support from the Global Environmental Facility. The draft inventory of greenhouse gas show very low levels of carbon dioxide and methane emissions; while other greenhouse gas emissions are non-existent or are present in negligible quantities. Although, Bhutan does not contribute to the causes of climate change we would like to stress the irreversible impacts of climate change on our water, human health, food production and fragile mountain ecosystems.

Bhutan is known for its rich biological diversity and has over 60 percent of the endemic species of flora and fauna of the eastern Himalayan region. As a result, Bhutan has been declared as one of ten global "hot-spots" for the conservation of biological diversity. Changes in the climate will place additional stress on the fragile mountain environment and as a result many species of flora and fauna will perish due to the limited possibilities for migration to new areas. The threats are most serious for endemic species that are confined to specific habitats.

Retreating glaciers, a clear sign of global warming is yet another serious threat to Bhutan's mountain ecosystems. We are experiencing more frequent floods caused by glacial lake out bursts, resulting in the loss of

biological and human resources and infrastructure. These floods also leave the earth's surface vulnerable to erosion and landslides for centuries to come.

Bhutan continues to support the Rio principles of global partnership and common but differentiated responsibility whereby, Annex I countries take the lead in reducing greenhouse gases. We also hope that the commitment to the Convention by all Parties will be manifested in international support for least developed countries with ecologically fragile mountain ecosystems.

Although, we are of the view that developed countries must take the lead role and responsibility stated in the Framework Convention in combating global climate change; we also believe that actions taken by developed countries alone will not be adequate to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. In the long run, all countries, both developed and developing, will have to work towards limiting greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective manner.

Bhutan is doing its part by preserving the country's rich natural resources and large carbon sinks. This preservation can be attributed to two factors, the enlightened political leadership and the strong conservation ethic of the Bhutanese people. Conservation is a central tenet of Buddhism. Therefore, preservation of the environment, sacred and cultural heritage sites are an important and an integral part of the Bhutanese value system.

My country under the wise and far-sighted leadership of His Majesty, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has recognized that socio-economic development

must be consistent with the needs of the people and the carrying capacity of the fragile environment in order to provide a sustainable base for the future. Therefore, we have chosen to forego immediate economic gains from the excessive exploitation of natural resources and have placed a higher priority on environmental conservation. We believe that the key to conserving natural resources will be involving the local people through community-based conservation. We have conserved over 72.5% of the total area of the country under forest cover. These forest reserves serve as a very large carbon sink for the benefit of the global community. In recognition of the importance of these sinks in combating climate change, Bhutan has been taking active steps in improving and enhancing them.

We are happy to inform you that at the regional level, the Environment Ministers' of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have had regular Meetings since 1992. At the Third Meeting held in Male', it was agreed that Climate Change impact on the region would be assessed on a regular basis. The fourth meeting of SAARC Environment Ministers was held in Colombo from 30th October to 1st November 1998.

With the assistance of our bilateral partners namely: Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Japan, Switzerland and India, and multilateral development organizations like the United Nations Development Programme, the Global Environmental Facility, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, Bhutan is working towards the achievement of sustainable development. We would like to express our gratitude for their support.

Madam President,

The Royal Government and the people of Bhutan reaffirm our commitment to the preservation of the global environment. We will continue to sequester harmful greenhouse gases and maintain and preserve one of the last remaining areas of pristine forests and rich biological diversity for the benefit of all future generations.

Thank you, Tashi Delek!