

**Statement by the Head of the Bhutanese delegation at the ECOSOC
Substantive session General Debate held at United Nations Headquarters,
New York, (1-3 July 2002)**

Mr. President,

In a manner of speaking, the Millennium Declaration Goals were a dramatic culmination and a summation of the work undertaken by the international community during the final decades of the last century. The Secretary-General made a clarion call towards fulfilling these Goals by urging members states to proceed from an era of commitments to an era of implementation.

In this context, my delegation is happy that the ECOSOC substantive session this year is focusing on health and education as it relates to fulfilling the Millennium Goals. The international community, including civil society and other stakeholders, is now fully cognizant of the critical importance of human resources development, especially in the context of health and education to the process of development. In fact, the intensity of this realization has led the international community to reaffirm “the right of everyone to education and to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

Professor Jeffrey Sachs, the advisor to the Secretary-General, has said that never before in human history has it been more possible than now for the international community to raise humanity from abject poverty conditions.

The international community has also emphasized the moral and ethical dimensions of ignoring the terrible and heart-rending poverty conditions that affect the vast majority of humankind. There is also the realization that no country or region can remain unaffected or isolated from the deteriorating environment, the spread of HIV/AIDS and the poverty in the developing countries. These are the factors that should move us to action. The role and responsibility of ECOSOC is primary in this context.

The implementation of the goals and strategies outlined in the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS requires greater resources than has thus far been allocated. The current projection is seven to ten billion dollars annually by 2005. We are informed that till now out of the current pledges of \$ 2.1 billion only \$ 300 million has been received. Towards this end we continue to urge donor countries and the private sector to increase their contributions to the Global Fund to combat HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria. It would be appropriate for ECOSOC to review the status and equitable utilization of the Fund from time to time, and see what additional action can be initiated to improve the working as well as the status of contributions to reach the desirable figure.

In the era of implementation, financing required for development projects and programs in the developing countries is nothing short of critical. This is more so when it comes to the highly disadvantaged peoples living in the Least Developed Countries, the landlocked and the island developing states. The severity of their problems requires special measures and attention by the OECD, United Nations, the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization.

The studies carried out in the World Bank and the UN make more than clear that current ODA levels need to be enhanced substantially. In fact, the Secretary-General called for the doubling of ODA at the Monterrey conference if we were to implement the Millennium Declaration Goals. Unfortunately, this level of commitment has thus far not been forthcoming. ECOSOC now has to monitor this matter by way of determining what bottlenecks exist in this context, and cultivate the proper atmosphere for the political will necessary among the developed countries to achieve international objectives.

Thus far, the compassionate and people-centered policy laid down by His Majesty the King, now familiarly known as “Gross National Happiness” has resulted in the provision of free health and education services to the people. This policy also aims at conserving the rich flora and fauna of the country, and with it one of the richest biodiversity of the Himalayan region. Every attempt has also been made to enrich the lives of the people through tradition, culture, art, architecture and religious pursuits and principles.

Since 1961, the Kingdom of Bhutan undertook a series of socioeconomic development plans, and in view of the successes achieved, Bhutan continues to follow this strategy with an emphasis on decentralization and a process of empowering the people. On the education front, we are heartened by our success in bringing primary education to over 85% of our population, and the attempts are going on to make this facility available to all. Out of the total number of children in schools, about half of them are female in keeping with the male-female population ratio, thereby demonstrating that Bhutan does not have a gender discrimination problem. Similarly, primary health coverage has reached 90% and 78% of the rural population have access to safe drinking water. Bhutan, with the valuable help and cooperation of our development partners, is on its way to achieving the Millennium Declaration Goals. Mr. President, Bhutan will be happy to share our experience with other countries and international agencies.

Bhutan is not only a least developed and a landlocked country, but the Bhutanese terrain is extremely mountainous. Though this provides breathtaking sceneries, it also makes the construction and maintenance of communications infrastructure, and especially roads, expensive and difficult. The terrain further makes it problematic in reaching out to and accessing all population segments with our health, education and other development programs.

We greatly appreciate the valuable contributions made by our development partners and by UNDP, UNICEF, UNCDF, UNFPA and others. However, since the recent past, we have been alarmed at the cuts imposed in the assistance programs, and can only hope that this is a short-term measure. The problem has arisen due to the decline in ODA and other

contributions from the OECD/DAC countries to these agencies. This trend should be reversed. And here too, the ECOSOC needs to monitor developments, determine the impact that such declines in ODA has on poverty, and the economic and social consequences to the developing countries.

In conclusion, Mr. President, ECOSOC's Charter responsibilities and role must not be undermined further. Strong leadership and firm support by member states and the UN Secretariat will be needed to enhance ECOSOC's ability to harness the cooperation of the international community, the Bretton Woods Institutions, and the WTO as well as the private sector towards fulfilling the Millennium Declaration Goals, and above all, making health and education facilities available to everyone.

Thank you.