

**Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Kunzang C. Namgyel,  
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations  
UN Event "Space for Civil Society" to mark the International Democracy Day  
15 September, 2015, UN Headquarters, New York**

Excellencies

Distinguished friends,

1. It is an honor to be co-sponsoring this important event to discuss the "Space for Civil Society" as we mark the International Day of Democracy and sharing with you some perspectives on this topic in the context of my country.
2. Under the guidance of our visionary Monarchs, Bhutan made a unique and peaceful transition into a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy in 2008. What is remarkable about our transition is that it has taken place in a short span of less than a decade.
3. The vital role of civil society for a vibrant democracy is recognized in Article 7 of our Constitution, which guarantees fundamental rights including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association by its citizens.
4. We strongly believe that citizens' participation is essential to ensure transparent, accountable and effective governance - three hallmarks of a vibrant democracy. CSOs are a key vehicle for such citizens' participation through advocacy, capacity building and other such initiatives aimed at citizens empowerment. Such empowerment enables citizens to be more aware of their rights and responsibilities and have a greater say in policymaking thereby making the government of the day more transparent, accountable and effective.
5. CSOs also play a critical role in creating an enabling environment for dialogue and building consensus among various stakeholders in society, thus strengthening the role of democracy in our country's overall development.
6. Bhutan has increasingly promoted the role of a free and independent civil society as a vital if not an indispensable pillar for a vibrant democracy. Over the last five years alone we have seen the establishment of 47 CSOs with a focus on issues ranging from youth, health, environment, education, poverty alleviation, corruption, media and democracy, rule of law and transparency and accountability in governance. A key factor that has contributed to the expanding space of CSOs in Bhutan has been the growth of a strong and independent media. We believe that a prerequisite for expanding the space of CSOs is a free and vigorous media.
7. Coming to the question about "Space for Civil Society" there is clearly a need to strengthen the role and space of CSOs at the community, national, regional and global levels if we are to effectively address many of the transnational challenges that confronts us today. In this context and in conclusion allow me share a quote by His Majesty the King of Bhutan, and I quote:

*" The solution to the many problems and challenges that we face as countries or as a global community cannot be solved by Governments alone. Solutions must be sought from ourselves - as citizens of our communities, our societies, our countries and the world."*

Thank you for your attention!