

**Statement by Hon'ble Dr Lotay Tshering, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of
Bhutan at the UN Food System Summit**

Mr. Secretary General
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates

1. I offer you my heartfelt greetings from the land of Gross National Happiness.
2. I am excited to participate in this summit because this is one area that is very close to my heart. As a doctor, I have been always sharing my thoughts on food and health habits at my workplace and clinics.
3. I genuinely believe that your health largely depends on what you eat. From being more efficient and happier at work, to the quality of sleep and positive psychology in life, almost everything has a lot to do with the food you eat.
4. But times are hard. Even before we discuss about the healthy food habit, I know that we have to first ensure availability and affordability of food by all.
5. So today, I have in my heart our fellow human beings from across the globe. As the burden of the pandemic weigh heavy on us, it has compromised the access and quality of foods and other essentials.
6. Forget about meeting nutritional requirements, the Asia-Pacific region alone has about 90 million people pushed back into poverty during this pandemic.

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7. Bhutan is a developing Himalayan nation, and the geographical landscape is far from favourable for a meaningful agriculture. The human-wildlife conflict and impacts of climate change are testing the resilience of our crops as well as the patience of our growers daily. And then we have tough environment and climate laws, which of course, is good in the long run but firm and rigid for immediate gains.

8. By our recent census, almost 44 percent of the employed persons are in the agriculture sector. Of that, most are practicing only subsistence farming that entails traditional methods and hard labour.
9. For us, the pandemic presented a stark reminder that we are an import driven country and need to do more in terms of food production. Only then can we play an active part in the global food system.
10. But we have a unique opportunity to reform the food system today. In doing so, we aspire to move from conventional to technology driven farming and from subsistence to commercial scale. Gradually, we need to progress to health-conscious dietary practices from mere taste preferences or cultural habits.

Excellencies,

11. In many countries, food shortage was a concern even during pre-pandemic but now the pandemic has disrupted food production, accessibility and supply chain all together.
12. My fear is that if we don't act quick, the situation might aggravate and cause a "hunger pandemic" next. This could claim more lives than COVID-19 and also trigger outbreak of multiple health conditions.
13. I am worried that if we don't ensure food security as one of the main constituents of economic revival in our post-pandemic way forward, this vicious cycle will continue, leaving many nations and millions of people behind.
14. Therefore, both the supply and demand structures world over need to be redesigned. Every country must have food self-sufficiency plan, and we all must help each other to achieve and maintain that.

15. Strengthening food system will not just be the biggest complementing factor to prevent and counter similar pandemics in future but also have positive impact on climate change.
16. It would enhance overall quality of living on the planet. And this summit is a perfect platform to initiate the wholesome approach.
17. For Bhutan, we pledge to do our part. I thank you for the opportunity and end with prayers for a healthier and stronger world.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.