

**Statement by Lyonpo Damcho Dorji, Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Royal Government of Bhutan
Inaugural Conference of the International Think Tank for LLDCs
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. 11 June 2018**

**Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,**

It is a pleasure for me to be here in the beautiful city of Ulaanbaatar. I would like to express my appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia and the International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries for convening this inaugural conference, the excellent arrangements made for the meeting, and the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

I wish to congratulate all member states of the ITT for LLDCs for ratifying the Multilateral Agreement for the Establishment of the International Think Tank. On our part we are proud to be associated with the body and express happiness with the formal operationalization of the ITT for LLDCs on 6 October 2017.

I would like to commend the leadership role taken by the Government of Mongolia in conceiving the idea for the establishment of a think tank for LLDCs, their efforts in seeking ratification by other LLDCs, and supporting the interim secretariat of the Think Tank till date. The signing of the host country agreement between the ITT and the Government of Mongolia is indeed a culmination of your efforts.

I take this opportunity to also congratulate His Excellency Odbayar Erdenetsogt on his appointment as the first executive director of the International Think Tank for LLDCs and express our confidence in his leadership in taking the ITT forward.

I also applaud the convening of the first meeting of the board of governors of the think tank last month and I congratulate and appreciate the work done by the members of the board in deciding on key issues related to the operation of the think tank.

Excellencies,

Bhutan's five year development plans guided by the broad development philosophy of Gross National Happiness has consistently placed its people at the centre of development and in this aspect, has been able to mainstream all the core elements of the Vienna Programme of Action. Being both a landlocked and least developed country, the six priorities identified in the VPOA finds good resonance in Bhutan's development agenda to strive towards self-reliance, accelerated by green socio-economic growth through investments in strategic infrastructure and structural transformation.

While we continue to achieve strong growth, we recognize that most of it is driven by growth in the Hydropower sector and have already experienced significant economic imbalances making our economy vulnerable to external shocks. We continue to face formidable challenges in terms of economic and structural impediments to growth. The lack of direct access to seaborne trade, difficult topography and remoteness from major markets, poor infrastructure, and inefficient logistic systems compound the adverse effects of geography, leading to high trade transaction costs. These challenges not only affect our economic growth but also have major ramifications for social and environmental aspects of development.

Excellencies,

The establishment of the ITT for LLDCs is timely which formalizes an institution that will strengthen the position of LLDCs. We believe that the ITT will be a useful resource for Bhutan and all member states and remain hopeful that the ITT will undertake concrete analytical studies on LLDC related issues which will contribute to the formulation of strategies and policies for the effective implementation of LLDC development agendas and processes. The analytical studies conducted by ITT on LLDCs-related issues will also enable us to undertake prudent policy decisions with the aim to benefit from international trade.

The establishment of the ITT will also provide the Member States, the opportunity to learn from each other's experience and foster closer cooperation among LLDCs.

Bhutan also looks forward to the possibility of exchange of scholars and researchers between ITT and our national organizations. This will be useful to facilitate sharing of experiences, information and network to better understand and undertake research on the challenges of LLDCs. As the ITT moves towards achieving its goal to improve the ability of LLDCs to build capacity in key areas by using top quality research and advocacy, it will be beneficial to collaborate with the national organizations and gaining their confidence which will facilitate the timely and effective implementation of recommendations.

Excellencies,

In closing, I would like to reiterate Bhutan's desire and commitment to work together and cooperate with other member states to foster convergent views and approaches towards addressing the common challenges faced by all LLDCs. Bhutan is committed in supporting the work of the International Think Tank through our voluntary contributions to the Trust Fund of the think tank. It is our hope that the ITT will promote a common platform and increase capacity of member states in dealing with trade and transit related issues among others.

Thank you.