

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Response on the questions and comments regarding women and child rights by the Director-General of the National Commission for Women and Children, Mrs. Phintsho Choeden, at the Human Rights Council on 30 April 2014 under the UPR mechanism

I thank the many delegations who have spoken on the rights of the women and children as well as to those who had raised the issues in their advance questions. It reflects the importance and priority attached by the international community to these issues, as it rightly should be, and representing the National Commission for Women and Children of Bhutan for promoting and protecting the rights of the women and children in our country, I am honored with this opportunity to provide a brief response to some of the issues as follows:

1) On the issue of Violence against Women, a study carried out in 2012 evidenced that due to mainly social cultural stereotypes, limited awareness of laws pertaining to domestic violence, limited services available for the victims, poverty and low level of education, there was a high level of acceptance of violence amongst the women. To address these, the following initiatives have been taken:

- Sensitization as well as capacity building programmes on gender equality, violence against women, laws and services available for the victims of violence.
- Establishment of more Women and Child Protection Units and Desks, and a One Stop Crisis Center at the National Hospital in the capital.
- Economic empowerment activities for women, especially rural women, to enhance their capacity to access livelihood and increased employment opportunities.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013 criminalizes all acts of domestic violence and, if committed under the influence of alcohol, is taken as an aggravating rather than a mitigating factor. The DVP Act Rules and Regulations has provisions for services such as shelter, counseling, legal, medical, livelihood skills training, helplines and protection units.

- 2) With regard to increasing access to justice for women victims of violence, the DVP Act and its Rules and Regulations provide for the following:
 - Unlike other criminal offences, the domestic violence cases can be filed before the court by not only the Royal Bhutan Police but also by the Victim, Complainant, Protection Officer and the Service Provider.
 - The involvement of the judiciary in issuing the Protection Order to victims also ensures and increases access to justice to the victims.
- 3) Towards increasing the number of women working on the issue of violence against women, the DVP Act mandates all the Protection Units and Desks to have at least one female police personnel working with them. Further, all examinations of the DV victims at the One Stop Crisis Center are required to be carried out by medical personnel of the same sex. Conscious efforts are also being made by the Royal Bhutan Police in recruiting more women every year.
- 4) On enhancing the participation of women in politics, although the results of the 2013 national elections show a 50 percent drop in women's representation in the National Assembly and with just 7% of women in the local government; in reality, a larger number of women

contested for the 2013 elections, with two of the four parties being led by Women Presidents.

- 5) An online Gender Monitoring System (GMS) has been developed to monitor gender related activities across different agencies. This system will provide support to the overall gender mainstreaming process and help to gather data and inputs for the development of reports on women and children.
- 6) In line with the current Government's pledge to have a legislation on quota for women, the NCWC has initiated the following processes:
 - An organization called the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women was formed to support and strengthen leadership capacities of both elected women representatives as well as aspiring women leaders.
 - A Stakeholder Consultation was conducted with key partners; both government and non-government, to discuss challenges related to women's political participation leading to the formulation of a draft "National Plan of Action" to improve gender equality in elected offices.
 - A national Consultation on increasing women's participation in politics was conducted where more than 150 participants from Ministries, agencies, CSOs, Parliament, Media, Local Government and the Private Sector attended to discuss issues and interventions related to introducing quota for women.
- 7) The preparation of the 8th and 9th CEDAW Report has started and the report will be ready for submission by end of 2014. An interim progress report on the two paras 18 and 20 (VAW and WIP) has already been submitted in 2013. Similarly, the preparation for the

CRC Report (3rd to 5th) has begun and will also be ready for submission by October 2014.

- On the issue of Trafficking in Persons, a situational analysis of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in Bhutan was carried out in 2011 and the findings showed that poverty, lack of awareness on trafficking, unemployment, illiteracy, lack of social support, broken families and lack of care were the main reasons for being trafficked. As interventions:
 - A SoP on trafficking has been drafted and is ready for finalization.
 - A mapping of partners (both across and within the country) was carried out in December 2012 to develop a common understanding on the issue and to map out the roles and responsibilities of the different partners.
 - Finally, a three year project to enhance Government and Civil Society Responses to Counter Trafficking in Persons (TIP) in Bhutan will be implemented soon.

Thank You.