

**SIERRA LEONE**

**19th Session of the Universal Periodic Review**

Bhutan

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR YVETTE STEVENS**

30 April 2014

Mr. President,

Sierra Leone warmly welcomes the delegation of Bhutan and applauds them for their very comprehensive national report, which was prepared as a result of an all-inclusive process.

My delegation applauds the Government of Bhutan on its commitment to maintaining the rule of law and strengthening democracy in the country. As the youngest democracy in South Asia, we note with appreciation Bhutan’s continued efforts to protect the fundamental freedoms of every citizen and for taking concrete steps to implement the recommendations of the first cycle of the UPR.

In spite of economic constraints, Bhutan has made marked progress in all human development indicators since 2010, in reducing poverty, in providing access to free health services and promoting good governance at the local levels and is on track to achieve most of the MDGs before 2015.

Bhutan is encouraged to continue its efforts to combat violence against women and facilitate their access to justice and to develop further incentives to reduce youth unemployment.

Sierra Leone recommends:

* Bhutan should take steps to ratify the core human rights conventions, in particular, the ICESC, the ICCPR, and the CAT.
* Bhutan should seriously review its laws and practices in relation to religious groups to ensure that all persons, religious denominations and institutions are able to freely associate and practice their religious beliefs.
* Bhutan should intensify its efforts to resolve the issues relating to displaced persons from the country currently living in a neighbouring country, through bilateral discussions.

Finally, my delegation would like to recognize the efforts made by Bhutan to define the concept of the Gross National Happiness Index, which "implies that sustainable development should take a holistic approach towards notions of progress and give equal importance to non-economic aspects of well-being".

My delegation wishes Bhutan every success in the outcome of this UPR process.

Mr. President,

I thank you.