

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Response on questions and comments related to the electoral process by Ambassador Sonam T. Rabgye, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Human Rights Council on 30 April 2014 under the UPR mechanism

I wish to touch on advance questions regarding voting rights in Bhutan.

All Bhutanese citizens who are not less than 18 years of age can vote. However, there is an exception. As per the Constitution and Election Act of Bhutan (2008) a member of the Royal Family and religious personalities or religious institutions neither participate in the electoral process nor join a political party as they are elevated to remain above politics and without patronizing any party or candidate in an election.

The first Parliament, which adopted the Constitution and enacted the Election Act 2008 felt that as a small country where religion plays a central and dominant role in the daily lives of majority of its citizens and where the institution of Monarchy is deeply revered, it would be in the best interest of the nation to exclude the above categories so that their influence are not used to benefit any candidate or party.

Moreover, as a young democracy, Bhutan hopes to avoid the pitfalls experienced by other countries, where religion has been used for political gains often leading to communal disharmony and violence.

Eligibility criteria to fulfill elective offices have also been established so that the electorate has the opportunity to choose qualified leaders. As education is free in Bhutan, and several hundred University Degree holders are emerging each year there will be no dearth of candidates seeking an elective office.

While Members of Parliament and Mayors must have a Formal University Degree the same is not required for those seeking local government elective offices.

With reference to advance questions reg. the Election Commission of Bhutan, I would like to mention that ECB is an independent entity as stipulated in the Constitution and the Election Act. ECB's actions however, can be questioned by the Judiciary and affected if an amendment of a law is passed by Parliament or as a result of an amendment by the Constitution.

Thank you.