**U.S. Statement at the Universal Periodic Review of Bhutan**

**33rd Session May 8, 2019**

The United States welcomes the Bhutanese delegation to the UPR Working Group.

We recommend that Bhutan:

1. Prevent the misuse of defamation laws to unduly constrain freedom of expression both online and offline.
2. Amend the Law on Religious Organizations to protect the free practice of religion and the ability of religious organizations to obtain legal status.
3. Resume discussions with the Government of Nepal on the status of individuals in Nepal who assert claims to Bhutanese citizenship or residency.

We welcome Bhutan’s achievements in democratization, including its third national election in 2018. We are concerned that enforcement of current legislation, if implemented, could pose undue restrictions on the freedoms of expression, association, and religion or belief. Defamation laws, as well as Bhutan’s penal code which criminalizes LGBTI status, could also pose severe limitations to these fundamental freedoms.

We are also concerned that the lack of clarity in laws addressing “inducements” to conversion potentially place the activities of members of certain religious groups at risk of legal sanction. The government has not allowed some religious organizations to register, which leaves those groups unable to operate legally and freely.