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**Happiness: New Direction for Development**

*(Introductory remarks by Mr. Jigmi Y. Thinley, Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs, Bhutan)*

There is a serious search for new direction. It involves people from all walks of life ie, academics, scientists, politicians, corporate leaders, religious personalities and even progressive farmers. They share the belief that mankind needs to mend its ways and rethink the very values for which it aspires.

When the OECD countries organized regional conferences on “Measuring and Fostering Societal Progress” in all the continents to culminate in the World Forum in Istanbul in July this year, representatives from 143 countries, including eminent thinkers and world leaders, showed up. I saw this as testimony to the search having become a mainstream world endeavour. A new age or a new way of life appears to be in the making.

Few communities and countries have, however, actually dared to make the search central to national discourse and subject of public policy. And so I am glad to be here today in one such country. I believe we have much to talk about and share. This is why I look forward to the result of this gathering and the ‘Third International Conference on Happiness’ being held here in November of this year.

***Thank and appreciate for inviting..***

In preparing for the subject I was asked to speak on, I was provoked by five questions that came to my mind. It is these questions that my remarks shall address.

1. Why is there a search for a new direction or an alternative paradigm for development as some might have it?
2. What is wrong with our way of life that worries us and makes us unhappy?
3. What are the risks faced by human society if we do not mend our ways?

4. What is development and why should happiness be its purpose?
5. What are the implications for public policy when happiness is the main indicator of development (risks and rewards)?

## **I. Why the search for a new direction?**

Could it be because as more and more of us cross over the thresholds of poverty and basic livelihood, we find the time to reflect on life and its meaning? In so doing, some of us find reasons for dissatisfaction with life as we live it. We are beginning to realize and understand that not only is our way of life as promised and indeed delivered by the conventional process of development, unfulfilling and hollow but that we are living dangerously. We are sensing a dire need for reality check and moderation at the very least, based on some understanding of what matters most in life.

## **II. Why are we not happy with our way of life, what is going wrong?**

To list a few examples:

1. Depletion of natural resources beyond admission of those who are responsible for informing the public.
2. Systemic collapse of eco systems that form the very basis of our sustenance. This includes climate change with its devastating consequences such as the increasing frequency of natural havocs.
3. Growing inequities, insecurities and despair that divide and polarize people and nations. These give rise to extreme poverty and deprivation amid affluence, brutal and macabre conflicts, forced population movements and even failures of states. These speak also of the paradox of globalization.
4. Disintegration of families and dying communities – signs that even as we are driven into smaller confines and as mutual dependence becomes compelling, we are drifting ever so apart signaling the collapse of human society. We lack the will to bond and share, beguiled by the ethics of competitive consumerism – yet another paradox of globalization.
5. Rising crime, drug abuse, suicide and specters of pandemic diseases that remind us of the failure of development to enhance human well being.
6. Longer life, thanks to modern medicine that prolongs our suffering of indignities and pains of old age and loneliness on the fringes of society.

7. The bizarre self destructive psychopath that mankind has become as it continues to employ its collective genius and energy to accelerate its own extinction. We refuse to be warned that with the disappearance of each living specie, our own end draws nearer.
8. Finally, at the end of the day, we are left with a nagging sense of emptiness, offset only by the hunger for more and an obsessive fear of losing what we have. We are oblivious to the truth that freedom and control over our own destiny have been sacrificed at the altar of wealth.

### **III. What then are the risks faced by human society?**

To mention a few in random order:

1. Dwindling resources, crop failures, 'waterborne' conflicts between neighbours, cities and nations, loss of biodiversity, disappearance of island and coastal areas causing untold human suffering. These will result in physical changes in the earth's surface and geography with awesome, unpredictable consequences.
2. Market competition becoming fiercer and corporate cannibalism and expansionism triggering tenacious protectionism in ways that could topple the WTO regime of supposed free and fair trade.
3. MNCs undermining elected governments to rule by default on the basis of share holders' mandate for profit before all else. This would lead to nations losing control of their economies to external variables and faceless powers creating further vulnerabilities to external shocks of the nature that could get far worse than that which Thailand has already experienced.
4. The danger of the poor becoming poorer and massive emigration waves from across the divide ramrodding through the fortress walls of rich countries to destabilize their economic, political and social architectures.
5. The sinking of the human individual, regardless of his hierarchy in society, into the deeper bowels of the whirlpool of willing enslavement for higher income at incalculable social and psychological costs. Hopelessly trapped in the rat race for more conspicuous and wasteful consumption, he would find neither time nor reason to contemplate the purpose of life – ie happiness.
6. A feverish nightmare of a struggle for supremacy as China and India, with their double digit growths, make gains in their competition against the established economic and military powers for access and control of the diminishing energy sources.

Not a comforting scenario! In fact, when I mentioned just a tiny bit of these at the World Forum, a fellow panelist was quick to retort that development as we have pursued, has provided just rewards. That too is true, but the costs are mounting and each is beyond the means of our generation. As for the means of future generations, that is what we are living on.

And who is the culprit? How did we come to face this predicament all in the name of progress and development? Could it be that we failed to correctly define the term and its composite values - that we adopted the wrong indicators by which we measured our progress? Were we wrong in allowing GDP and its allied indicators to dominate our way our life?

It is indeed fascinating how this indicator has dictated our way of life with its dominant ethics of consumerism. We live in a world today in which the purpose of life is to become rich – in which the role of governments is to lead their countries to greater material acquisition. We have unquestioningly accepted the notion that GDP provides the truth about how well a country and its people are doing.

But how much more happiness has wealth brought even to the richest among us? Have the rich become more secure, contented and at peace with themselves? Are the rich and powerful nations confident of continued growth and stability? Can they be sure of their future ten years from now? And yes, how much happier are the Americans and the Japanese compared to those who are at the other end of the development scale?

Here I must repeat what I have said very often. As human beings, we are bound together in a common journey. We are all hands aboard ships in a vast uncharted ocean. To stretch the metaphor further, those that are highly industrialized are ships with full sails while the least developed countries are those yet to raise sail. In the end, it matters very little whether our ships are cruising or faltering, as both are without rudder and steering.

There are many who would agree that ours is a story of how the supposed means to happiness have been mistaken for the end itself. And having lost sight of happiness, we have committed ourselves to a life of endless labour and the goal of mindless growth. For too long, we have chased symbols of success that we believed would give rise to happiness. For too long we have chased illusions. Quite literally, this journey without a true destination is

doomed. That is why we need a clear destination, a new direction. We need to be certain about what it is that we want to achieve through development and how to measure the progress we make.

*Not to suggest what?*

#### **IV. What is development and why should happiness be its purpose?**

What should be the fruit of development at the end of each day, year and life? What might we consider a rewarding experience, a civilized society, a fulfilling life? What should one count, weigh and cherish?

And when we speak of development being just, equitable and sustainable, what do we really understand especially in a globalized world? How should we answer the questions: responsibility to whom; accountability to whom; equity for whom and sustainability until when?

Should we, perhaps, begin with honesty and courage to acknowledge that our way of life is not sustainable and that it is even unconscionable with respect to future generations? Could we accept that when we think of promoting true well being, we need to think of equity in terms of inter regions, intra generations and inter generations beyond the very narrow bounds of contemporary populations, time and space?

How we perceive development is conditioned by the values for which we aspire. If we agree that happiness is the single most important value that all of us yearn for, then **it** should obviously be the purpose of development. The most important indicator for development efforts must, therefore, be the extent to which happiness of individuals and groups increases over time.

At this stage, I cannot resist the temptation to bring a few thoughts, some shared by others, to your attention. In random order, these are:

1. Man is less an economic animal and more a social being whose sense of well being comes less from material gain. It comes more from mental growth and spiritual nourishment. Development ought to, therefore, cater to the dual needs of the body and mind, the latter beyond the modern sense of education.
2. Economic growth and higher personal income are not synonymous with societal advancement and human development. The dogma of limitless and mindless economic growth must be challenged if not abandoned and its rapid exhaustion of natural resources halted.

3. Human society is not a market place where people compete for profit on goods and services, much of which we are better off without. And market evangelism and the sanctity of its powerful forces need serious questioning.
4. Development must mean furtherance of the subjective sense of well being in an environ of peace and predictable future. It should lessen craving for more and remove cause for envy and gluttonous consumerism.
5. There is a need to honestly admit that ours and the last two generations in particular, having squandered and abused our own share of natural resources are guilty of grossly trespassing into what rightfully belongs to future generations. To that extent, we have lessened the chances of their wellbeing and the very survival of children and generations unborn. I believe Sufficiency economy attempts, among others, to redress this wrong.
6. *Everything that respects or conforms to the law of nature or is just is sustainable. This includes social systems, legal or political systems, agriculture, economy, trade, international relations, peace and security.*
7. The real material needs of the human being are indeed basic and easily obtainable while those of the mind are far greater. If development as we understand and pursue puts material demands in the center to the neglect of the spiritual, could not our understanding be wrong? Is it not in the furtherance of the mind's need to which we must devote more time and energy? Could satisfaction and happiness not be the product of the mind's development in a secure environment?

**V. What are the implications for public policy when happiness is the main indicator of development (risks and rewards)? Must it and can it be measured?**

Policy and rhetoric must be separated. Policies, I believe are honest commitments of the state to undertake certain actions in the interest of the people. It is also on the basis of policies presented as campaign promises during the electoral process on which the people judge the performance of a government and its leadership. Therefore, well meaning policies must be stated in practicable terms that lend themselves to easy and convenient assessment. This means policies should be either clearly qualifiable or quantifiable, the latter being preferred.

The biggest challenge for policy makers in making happiness central to public policy, I think, lies in the fact that a clear and acceptable set of indicators have yet to be accepted. Praiseworthy attempts have been made in several countries by research institutions and individuals including in Bhutan and by Bhutanese. Some may argue for a more concerted effort on developing a single aggregate indicator even though such an attempt is fraught with so many dangers. This happens to be so even in Bhutan where our development process, in more than three decades, has been guided by the philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

I would like to submit that a serious effort to develop happiness indicators has in fact been initiated in Bhutan. The Center for Bhutan Studies has made fairly good progress in this regard and it is intended that our annual and five-year development plans will soon incorporate the resultant indices. To speak briefly on this subject, I should, perhaps, mention how indicators are being developed to cover nine domains in relation to the philosophy of GNH. As this philosophy is translated into public policy in the form of a set of four strategies, popularly known as the four pillars, I shall quickly list them in the same order.

**I. *Equitable and sustainable socio economic development:***

1. *Health status: Physical health status, mortality and morbidity patterns, disability, self rating on health status.*
2. *Living standard: Basic eco status and income, employment, food and shelter security, land etc.*
3. *Education: enrollment(access), skills, educational support, content etc*

**II. *Sustainable environment:***

4. *Ecological diversity and resilience: state of resource management, diversity, supply and demand status of land, water, forest, air, bio diversity, practices and policy.*

**IV. *Preservation and promotion of culture:***

5. *Cultural diversity and resilience: strength of culture, diversity and practices, diversity of language, architecture, arts, music, dance, crafts, sense of identity.*
6. *Community vitality: strength and weakness of relationships and interaction, volunteerism, civil society, care giving, family net work etc.*
7. *Time Use: how time is used in 24 hours or longer frames to determine how social, cultural, eco, human capital is spent, how bonds are created and sustained etc.*

8. *Psychological well being: Health of mind, contentment, satisfaction etc.*

**Good Governance:**

9. *Governance quality, empowerment, freedom of the press, decision making etc.*

It is with a great deal of excitement that I have learnt of the Royal Thai government having already operationalized a set of indices. I commend their success. I and my colleagues hope to use this opportunity to learn from our worthy colleagues and to continue to work with them.

Having earlier presented a rather gloomy picture of the world, I would like to leave a smile on your faces by making special mention of a few developments that warm our hearts. These are:

*Iceland, a country that was entirely dependent on coal and gas for its energy needs was able to transform its energy system completely to geothermal in a matter of a short span of time. And the good news is that there are over 70 countries including the US, China and India that are well endowed with this form of energy.*

*Brazil has found near complete energy security based on sugar cane ethanol even as several countries continue their search for carbon neutral and renewable energy sources.*

*California in the US continues in its endeavours to set the highest standards and most stringent laws on energy conservation.*

*Norway is setting a new example on ethical investment.*

*Bhutan will remain steadfast on its developmental path to Happiness.*

*Thailand has inspired all of us with its 'sufficiency econom'.*

*Thank and wish the Conference success.*

*Wish all members Happiness!*

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*I love this car. But in think I love what it stands for even more*