

# **Election Commission of Bhutan**

**Opening Statement of the Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan**

*Seminar on Lessons Learnt from the Study Tour*

*to*

*Denmark by Political Parties of Bhutan*

**25<sup>th</sup> of July 2014**

**Honoured Dignitaries,  
Members of diplomatic corps,  
Representative of International and Bilateral Offices,  
Members of Parliament,  
Members of Political Parties,  
Members of Bhutanese media, civil and non-governmental bodies,  
Officials from BNEW,  
Election Commissioners and senior colleagues from ECB,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.**

1. On behalf of the Election Commission of Bhutan and on my own behalf I deem it a great opportunity to be here with the members of the five registered Political Parties, Media, civil service, civil societies, nongovernmental organization and the BNEW Coordinator/DIPD Focal Person, and I would like to extend a warm welcome to all and thank each and every one heartily for being here this morning.
2. This kind of get-together has been rare while it could have been more often, as during such occasions, the meeting of minds is made possible.
3. It is the wish of Their Majesties the Kings that the Democracy is the most effective means to further our National Goals and thus democracy must be deepened and strengthened to ensure, ultimately, the wellbeing of our People and Nation. As such, any useful effort that could help us move on this path, is something that we have to fully support and participate in.
4. We are here today at the initiative of the group of Representatives from the Registered Political Parties of Bhutan who have recently returned from a fruitful study trip to Denmark. The team comprised of former MPs, top-level party executives and qualified members of our Political Parties.

5. I am glad to report that they have come back fully energized. While reinforcing their commitment to their respective party principles they have resolved that there is need to go beyond partisan politics and work together on the path towards the common national goals and objectives. They have come back with very refreshing thoughts, ideas and projects.
  
6. It would indeed be amiss on the part of the Election Commission if we fall short in seizing this momentum to capitalize on the enthusiasm with which they returned to make a difference. Personally, it brought back memories of our own intensive learning experiences, in particular the very first trip to India, at the invitation of the then Chief Election Commissioner His excellency Shri B.B. Tandon, Election Commission of India, merely weeks after our appointment to the ECB when we made the decision, in a matter of days, to opt for EVMs as the primary means for Polling and this single decision has been pivotal to how the polling and result declaring process have manifested in our electoral system! Coincidentally that visit is referred as the *God Sent Crash Course* in the book titled *An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election* written by the former Chief Election Commissioner of India His Excellency Shri Dr. S.Y. Quraishi which was released recently.
  
7. While I believe that there is much to learn from others, yet mere copying of ideas from others without assessing the relevance to our own unique context would be pointless. Nevertheless, the constructive ones that serve the purpose of the wellbeing of the country and citizen should be embraced and we should proceed and work on it as far as possible with the available resources. It is in this light that we welcome one such idea of establishing the *Bhutan Democracy Dialogue* to bring parties together to jointly nurture democracy. Others include, the very innovative idea of observing the Constitution Day and the “People’s Meeting” as a forum to create opportunity for more interaction and understanding between politicians and citizens.

8. We hope that beginning with this seminar, the ECB in collaboration with political parties irrespective of electoral status would be able to engage in meaningful operative activities that would promote a healthy democratic culture.
9. This is particularly so in view of the fact that Political Parties cannot, under the Laws, receive any support except from its registered members, and all and any external cooperation and technical assistance to Political Parties in Bhutan should be with the ECB under its responsibility to promote democracy and facilitate Political Parties.
10. This Seminar is thus an effort on our part to take advantage through the sharing of exciting times and useful ideas that the multiparty team have come back with.
11. We look forward to a very illuminating occasion when we will have the opportunity to listen to their impressions, views and insights into engaging beyond politics, as it was also the first occasion, after the 2013 Elections, for representatives of all five Parties to be totally immersed together. They were able to leave all their differences behind and, as *Bhutanese First*, interact, discuss and work together in a neutral context.

**Thank you**