

**Speech of the Chief Election Commissioner of Bhutan at the Eighth Anniversary of the  
Election Commission of Bhutan at 10am on 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2014 at Chang Olakha,  
Thimphu**

Hon'ble President of the National Legal Institute, Her Royal Highness Ashi Sonam Dechhan Wangchuck,

Hon'ble Prime Minister, Lyonchhen Tshering Tobgay,

Hon'ble Chairman of the National Council, Lyonpo Sonam Kinga,

Hon'ble Chairperson of the Royal Privy Council, Lyonpo Chenkyab Dorji,

Hon'ble Lyonpos Dorji Choden and Damchoe Dorji,

Hon'ble Member of Privy Council, Dasho Nado Rinchhen,

Hon'ble Acting Chief Justice of the High Court, Dasho Sangay Khandu,

Hon'ble Chief of Police, Dozin Kipchu Namgyel,

Hon'ble Members of the Delimitation Commission of Bhutan and Secretary Home Dasho Tshering Dorji,

Distinguished Presidents and Senior Executives of Political Parties,

Hon'ble Counselor, Embassy of India in Bhutan, Shri S. Das,

Her Excellency Resident Coordinator, Ms. Cristina Carlson,

Director, SDC, Mr. Matthias Maier,

Hon'ble Secretary General of National Council, Dasho Tshewang Norbu,

Secretary General, Association of Bhutan Tour Operators, Mr. Sonam Dorji,

Respected Dasho and Aums,

Distinguished guests,

My Colleagues, and

Ladies and gentlemen.

1. May I join my colleagues in welcoming one and all to the Election Commission of Bhutan.
2. We have as a token of reminding ourselves that 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2006 was the day of the birth of the Election Commission of Bhutan, and hence observed every 16<sup>th</sup> of January with a symbolic function. This year as ECB attains its eighth year in existence we felt we observe it in a formal manner as an occasion to reflect and redirect our focus. It is interesting this year the 17<sup>th</sup> of December 2014 was on an auspicious date. This day today is also on an auspicious *zakar*, as it is on the second 15<sup>th</sup> of *dawa chunyipa*. For this reason this anniversary is an exclusive one.
3. We are deeply honoured with the special presence of Her Royal Highness. We cannot thank Your Royal Highness enough for the continued unstinting support showered in all we do all the time. We have glorious memories, fresh in our minds, of the launching of the BRIDGE Model on “Democracy in Our Place” at Zhiwaling Paro a few years ago. When Your Royal Highness released all the rules, bye-laws finalized based on views of Parliament and feedback from the LEP 2008 that ensured smooth sailing of our elections.
4. We are also delighted by the presence of Hon’ble Prime Minister of Bhutan and *Thrizin* of the National Council amidst us to celebrate this day. We are glad that so many dignitaries have made special efforts in making it convenient to join us despite your busy preoccupations.
5. We rejoice in the fact that Bhutan’s Second Parliamentary Elections concluded peacefully. In about a week the Nation will witness the Second Parliament of Bhutan to sit for its Second Session.

**Your Royal Highness,**

6. The positive reports both internationally and nationally received on our elections, and now further reaffirmed recently nationwide from the findings of our exercise the Learning from Exercise LEP 2013, gives us all at ECB the greatest sense of elation and confidence.
7. We are glad to report that our electoral activities having met the expectations of most, we are optimistic that future elections will even be better, from the further value additions due to several recommendations.
8. A few of the most significant eleven of the recommendations that might receive our priority consideration, if I may highlight, are:
  - 1) Common Forum to be continued but its coverage be reached to every *Chiwog* and beyond;
  - 2) Revisit the need and role party workers and volunteers play in the political process;
  - 3) Increase duration and coverage of Voter and Civic education covering also electoral officers and members of political parties;
  - 4) Review the need and utility of the door-to-door election campaign when Public Debates and Common Forums are more effective;
  - 5) Address issues such as number, location and structure of Polling Stations;
  - 6) Adopt cost cutting measures in elections through improved processes of electoral activities;
  - 7) Enhance participation of women to run for elected positions and offices;
  - 8) Revisit Postal Ballot related issues to rule out any controversy;
  - 9) Streamline further the inclusiveness and correctness of information on electoral rolls and voter lists;
  - 10) Explore options such as early and absentee voting; and
  - 11) Explore ways and means for effective engagement of youth in electoral processes.

9. ECB looks forward, in the ensuing months, to work on the electoral standards those that merit further reinforcing and streamlining, towards building an electoral system, one that engages active participation of citizenry and facilitate future elections to select the best national leaders, for ensuring wellbeing of people and safeguarding the sovereignty and security of the Nation.
10. In a moment, Her Royal Highness will release the LEP Report 2013 to be placed before the Bhutanese society. In this connection, we shall also attempt to share some pictorial glimpses, statistical account and the physical display of elections and works of the Election Commission in the form of reports and exhibitions.
11. We are hopeful that unlike the First Parliament, the Second Parliament would uphold the provisions of the Constitution faithfully and respectfully and rely on authoritative interpretation and lawful application of the same. We hope the Local Government Act 2009 amended, and it will address all issues that are in conflict with the provisions enshrined in the Constitution.
12. The Election Commission of Bhutan and the Delimitation Commission of Bhutan will then be able to carry out a comprehensive delimitation of both Parliamentary and Local Government *Demkhongs* and issue PVC biometric VPIC to all voters. Let us avoid creation of another case of Samdrup Jongkhar Thromde bordering strongly as a case of gerrymandering.
13. Upon completion of the delimitation, information for every polling station for all elections will be captured in a programme in digitised format developed on ArcGIS Based Polling Station Information System that is being launched today.
14. As per resolution of FEMBoSA, Bhutan will observe 15<sup>th</sup> September every year coinciding the International Day of Democracy as the National Voters' Day when efforts will be made to issue VPIC to all those coming of age and were left out from the voter registration. As one other activity of FEMBoSA we shall carry out a study as to how

participation of women in politics could be enhanced including looking at desirability of system of quotas.

15. We shall also carry out One-Stop-Civil Registry & Voter registration in collaboration with the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, ministry of Works and Human Settlement and Dzongkhag Administrations to facilitate ease of civil registration and rationalise proper representation and effective voter participation in elections. It is high time that the anomaly of Thimphu with highest census population with least representation in Parliament and some Dzongkhags with many *goong-tongs* receiving higher representation in elected decision-making bodies, due to absentee registered voters, to be corrected.
16. Since the Royal University of Bhutan has repeatedly pleaded against it being made responsible to attest the formal university degree certificate, a proper thought is required to be given as to determine the most appropriate agency and/ or whether ECB itself could take up the responsibility, as under the laws a formal degree certificates has to be attested to be accepted by Returning Officers as the valid academic testimonials.
17. It is important that that an important institution, the most indispensable of all the Constitutional Bodies, the Election Commission Bhutan is housed in a befitting edifice. We intend to build a structure that is architecturally unique, a functionally useful and evoking democratic spirits imbued with cultural attribute. We are hopeful that *Democracy House* will see its day soon as we shall have the *salang tendrel* on 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2014 presided over by Their Majesties the *Druk Gyalpo* and *Gyaltsuen*. In the ensuing months, we will vigorously pursue activities towards building of offices in each of the twenty Dzongkhags.
18. The first Royal Decree of the Druk Gyalpo on election highlights at length the importance of the civic and voter education. ECB as one of its primary role play an active part to cover all stakeholders. Towards this, we have launched V-VOICE to rope in volunteers willing to contribute services during elections and education of voters;

*NETWORK* to cater opportunity to professionals interested in sharing knowledge and experience in democracy and elections; and Democracy Clubs to prepare future voters and politicians to appreciate democratic values and embrace electoral practices right at their young, formative and impressionable age.

19. We shall also work on building a state of the art institute to be called Election Resource and Training Centre (ERTC). BRIDGE and SIM Democracy could also make up any short falls in carrying out the education of voters and stakeholders.

20. We present the first Annual Democracy Club Magazine containing the passionate views and feelings of the members. As Her Royal Highness will release the First issue, let us wish every Democracy Club good luck in grooming future national builders, law makers and citizens. Let them not waver from constitutionally set path for the Kingdom. We shall take the opportunity to congratulate all schools and institutions that have volunteered to host Democracy Clubs.

### **Distinguished Guests**

21. Bhutan, in terms of population is one of the smallest multi-party democracies in the world. It is advisable and feasible that we have only few political parties. It is important that political parties consolidate rather than proliferate, paling into insignificance. In this regard, as was committed to the Nation during the election when a few members of *Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT)* joined PDP, ECB will in due course of time conduct an organizational review as to the status of the DNT as a political party.

### **Ladies and gentlemen,**

22. ECB had the opportunity to observe elections in many other countries. Such visits are used to offer our solidarity to host election management bodies, to learn and exchange

good practices. We feel convinced from practices elsewhere that Bhutan could do with lesser security and more transparent and cost effective polling arrangements.

23. Bhutan is currently holding the Chair of the forum of election management bodies of South Asia named as FEMBoSA. It is also a founding member of first-ever association of world election management bodies established recently in the name of the Association of the World Election Management Bodies (A-WEB). It is also a member of the Association of Asian Election Authorities (AAEA) and will be associated regularly with UN GEO. We have bilateral ties with likeminded election bodies namely Election Commission of India, Australian Electoral Commission and International IDEA. ECB will continue to strive to play a dynamic role to impact democracies elsewhere with our electoral practices and experience as best electoral practices.

#### **Ladies and gentlemen**

24. On this very important day, we would like to offer our gratitude to His Majesty the King, Royal Government of Bhutan, all stakeholders, voters, election officers and political parties for the rare privilege given to us to be part of this historic process.

25. We would also like to place on record our gratitude for the support and continued goodwill of our donors and friends in particular GOI, DANIDA, UNDP, EU, SDC, AUSAID, ECI, AEC, International IDEA and all those who help us on our journey.

#### **Your Royal Highness,**

26. Bhutan is fortunate that we are blessed with Your Royal Highness, as the Royal Patron of the judiciary and legal profession, crucial for upholding justice. True Democracy can sustain only if there is a jurisprudence that guarantees justice. With the commitment of Your Royal Highness Bhutan cannot but be doubly reassured.

27. The ECB offers our congratulation to Your Royal Highness for the dedicated services being rendered in strengthening legal institutions and professions in the Kingdom. It will be our honour and privilege to collaborate, cooperate and supplement the National Legal Institute and the Office of Your Royal Highness for a meaningful democratic education through our voter education efforts and our work with Democracy Clubs.
28. We hope that this office during its eight years of growth had lived up to expectation of Their Majesties, The Kings of Bhutan and people of Bhutan. As the present team of Commissioners would complete our term in mid-2015, we will strive to leave behind a legacy of a well-functioning setup restructured and re-strengthened.
29. In this positive spirit, the Election Commission of Bhutan re-dedicates its services to the *Tsawa Sum* with *lui ngag yid sum* to undertake every election with greater confidence.
30. May Electoral Democracy flourish in the Land of Palden Drukpa and bring further peace, prosperity and happiness to every Bhutanese!

**Tashi Deleg!!!**