**Official Statement for the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Second Session, Geneva, Switzerland**

***(By Hon’ble Minister, Lyonpo Minjur Dorji, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan)***

United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Convener of the Global Platform,

Hon’ble Heads of State and Prime Ministers of various countries,

Hon’ble Ministers representing various countries,

Distinguished representatives and personalities from various countries, the UN organizations and other agencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Best wishes and warm greetings from my country, Bhutan, to everyone present here today.

The ***Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction***, as the main body of the ***International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)*** was instituted to assess and facilitate the implementation of the ***Hyogo Framework for Action*** and to advance world-wide commitment and momentum in building disaster resilient communities and nations. The Global Platform also affords us a platform for sharing experiences, good practices and advocacy at the highest level.

Since the ***World Conference*** in Kobe, Japan, and the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action in 2005, there has been global recognition on the need to reduce disaster risks and take pro-active measures to adapt to our changing climate. We can witness an increased commitment to implement the ***Five Priorities for Action*** in many countries at various levels.

However, the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters happening around the world and in the face of accelerated impacts and effects of climate change and global warming, we need to not only do more in terms of disaster risk reduction but take action urgently and persistently. Our rhetoric and objectives at the global and national level and realities at the community level should match.

I believe that this year’s theme - ***“poverty reduction and disasters”*** is most apt and relevant. Poverty is not only a key factor in increasing disaster risks but disaster impacts in fact deepen and perpetuate poverty. I hope that Second Session of the Global Platform on Disaster Reduction will focus on linkages between disasters and poverty and deliberate on how to improve the resilience of the poorest and most vulnerable sections of our society. Together, we must all direct our concerted efforts and find ways to systematically integrate disaster risk reduction into our policies and plans for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Bhutan, though recently, but certainly and steadily, has embarked on the journey of making our communities safer and disaster resilient. We are making our own modest efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action. The ***National Disaster Risk Management Framework for Bhutan***, endorsed by the government in 2006, acknowledges the need for disaster risk reduction, the importance of mainstreaming and adopting a multi-sectoral approach.

Considering disaster management a priority, the Government in August 2008 upgraded the erstwhile Disaster Management Division to a full fledged Department under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs. This Department functions as the National Coordinating Agency for disaster management and has been working in coordination with various sectors and agencies in-country and partnering with regional and neighboring disaster management organization and institutions in implementing the national framework and within that the Five Priorities for Action.

Under ***Priority I, “Ensuring Disaster Risk Reduction is a National and Local Priority with Strong Institutional Basis for Implementation***”, Bhutan is now working towards adopting the ***National Disaster Risk Management Bill*** which assures decentralized and empowered institutions at all levels and guarantees financial support and funding mechanisms. ***Disaster Risk Management Planning Guidelines*** at various levels have been developed with the underlying principle of promoting ***Community Based Disaster Risk Management***.

Under ***Priority II, “Identifying, Assessing and Monitoring Disaster Risks and Enhancing Early Warning”***. I am pleased to report that Bhutan has completed the ***Glacial Lake Outburst Flood Hazard Zonation Map*** for our most vulnerable river basin. We are now in the process of setting up an automatic early warning system and strengthening our existing manual system to make it more comprehensive and community based. One of our priorities is to formulate an initial ***multi-hazard atlas for Bhutan*** and complete, as much as possible, risk assessments for all our valleys within the present ***Tenth Five Year Plan***. We are also partnering with various regional early warning initiatives and initiating the set up of emergency operation centers to ensure an effective disaster communications network.

Under ***Priority III, “Using Knowledge, Innovation, Education to Build a Culture of Safety and Resilience at all Levels”***, Bhutan has launched many awareness programs through various media and held many seminars and conferences, including the observance of ***International Disaster Reduction Day***. We have also launched a ***“Safe Schools”*** campaign and delivered basic first responder trainings and conducted mock drills in schools and institutions. Almost all schools in Bhutan now have their own school disaster management plans in place. We, however, need to still build our capacities, especially in terms of technical manpower and equipments. We hope to build a culture of resilience through schools as community nodes and in the communities, through various sectors and ultimately achieve ***“Development with Disaster Resilience”***.

Under ***Priority IV, “Reducing Underlying Risk Factors”***, I cannot underscore importance of our development philosophy of ***“Gross National Happiness”*** ***(GNH)*** and our environment preservation strategy of ***“The Middle Path”***. Such guiding philosophies and strategies have ensured, to a certain extent, a cautious approach to development and stringent environment related rules and regulations, which have helped in reducing related risk factors. We are still working towards integrating Disaster Risk Reduction into all development sectors, however, the first steps of formulating multi-sectoral coordinating and decision making bodies and mechanisms have been completed.

Under ***Priority V, “Strengthening Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response at all levels”,*** we are pleased to report that Bhutan hosted a ***United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Team*** (29 March – 12 April, 2008) to assess our response preparedness. The mission report identifies 38 recommendations and we are well in the process of implementing them. Also, with technical support from the ***International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)***, Bhutan has completed the field testing of its ***Community Based Risk Management Curriculum*** and recently completed the training of our first batch of district disaster management teams. We are hoping to see our first two district disaster management and preparedness plans by the end of this year.

Bhutan has made small but significant achievements, but much still remains to be done. I would like to assure the United Nations and all participants here that the Government of Bhutan is fully committed to the goals and priorities laid out in the Hyogo Framework for Action and we aspire not only to make Bhutan a safe and happy, but also to work in collaboration with UN, regional and bilateral agencies towards reducing disaster risks.

I look forward to fruitful deliberations in this Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and hope to learn from all esteemed panelists and participants attending the Session.

Thank you very much and Tashi Deleaqk!!