

## Gross National Happiness Conference: Keynote Address

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[CROWD CHATTING]

SPEAKER: Good morning. We'll first begin with Marchang ceremony, which actually literally means butter and alcohol [? ritual. ?]

[NON-ENGLISH CHANTING]

KINGA TSHERING: Good morning and welcome to the Harvard Divinity School, your excellency, Madam Ambassador Doma Tshering to the permanent mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, New York, Dasho Karma Tshiteem, honorable chairman of the Royal Civil Service Commission of the royal government of Bhutan. Dean David N. Hempton of the Harvard Divinity School. Honorable, esteemed speakers as panelists and most wonderful and special participants to this happiness conference.

My name is Kinga Tshering, and I am an MDiv student here at the Divinity School. And I'm from Bhutan, as you can see, wearing my national dress with the biggest pocket. And that's where I took all my file from. And you can also see that men in Britain can have the option of wearing some of the brightest skirts.

Today's conference theme, reimagining happiness for a better world, connects the Gross National Happiness, the GNH, to the many academic discourses on the subject here at Harvard University conceptualized by the fourth King of Bhutan to shape the nation's policies in lieu of the conventional GDP, which is their gross domestic product. Professor Derek Bok, the 25th president of the Harvard University, brought this concept to academic discourse and broader political attention at Harvard through his book called The Politics of Happiness in 2010.

There is a profound urgency in the quest for happiness as our lives and communities becomes more complex, driven by global political and technological change. So how do we govern for happiness? For that matter, how do you even attempt to measure happiness? And how do you imagine happiness?

This inaugural happiness conference at Harvard Divinity School will explore these questions, among others, about what is now increasingly becoming a global movement. We have eminent experts here, leaders and practitioners all the way from Australia, Bhutan, Canada-- and for D, I have to use the Divinity School-- and Estonia, leading up to what is truly a monumental conference this side of the Atlantic.

In the run up to this conference, I discovered, actually, three things that made me happy organizing this conference. First was about hope in the face of rejections. Happiness is knowing who comes through in times of need.

For this conference, it was the Harvard Divinity Students Association and the Diversity Fund, the Saul O Sidore Memorial Foundation, [? Metal ?]

Foundation, and friends like Emily Davis, David, George Larson, Richard Fuchs, and in particular, to Vish and the Harvard TH Chan's Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness.

Second was about trust in the face of uncertainties. For this conference, it was our honorable speakers. I would like to thank first my advisors and mentors and all the speakers starting from her excellency for your trust and commitment of personal resources and time to be at this event. And finally, it was a spirit of compassion in the face of risks and adversities.

My friends and organizing teams realized that it was not only mine but their reputation which is on line as well. So therefore, I thank each and every one of my team members and friends and for many volunteers were putting in endless hours and effort in making this happen.

Most of all, this would not have been possible without the support of the Harvard Divinity School, opening, as you see, this beautiful campus for the conference. In this, I'm especially grateful that we have the dean of Divinity School with us today to deliver the welcome address. Dean David N. Hempton was appointed the dean of the Divinity School in July, 2012. Before this, he was a faculty. Joined in 2007. And before this, he was a university professor at Boston University, and prior to that appointment, a professor of modern history and director of the School of History in Queens University, Belfast.

Dean Hempton is a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. In recent years, he has delivered the FD Maurice lectures at King's College, London, held a fellowship of the National Endowment for Humanities, and HDS' outstanding teacher of the year in 2008. He is author of many articles and books, the latest of which is The Secularization and Religious Innovation in the North Atlantic World.

And I've also been extremely fortunate to be involved in one of the initiatives of the dean which is called the Religions and the Practice of Peace-- RPP. As we reflect today's conference theme, we can certainly agree that peace is a basic condition that is required for happiness. So with this, may I now invite Professor David N Hempton, the dean of Divinity School, to kindly come to the podium and deliver the welcome address.

[APPLAUSE]

DAVID N. HEMPTON: Thank you, Kinga, for that wonderful introduction. And welcome, everyone. I don't think I've ever seen this chapel look so beautiful. What a wonderful opening ceremony. I think I'll start all Harvard Divinity School faculty meetings with this ceremony.

Your excellency, Ambassador Doma Tshering, permanent representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations in New York. Dasho Karma Tshiteem, honorable chairman of the Royal Civil Service Commission of the royal government of Bhutan. Honorable speakers, panelists, participants, I extend a very warm Harvard Divinity School welcome to all of you. Thank

you for being here. I've never seen this room full on a Saturday morning before.

Especially this late in our spring semester when we all began to tire, there could be no happier topic to talk about than happiness. So I am personally very happy to be here. The theme of happiness resonates with our HDS vision in general and the religions and practice of peace and sustainable peace initiatives in particular, which is something that we've been emphasizing these past years.

We're eager to learn how our Divinity School can provide the lead platform across Harvard to encompass initiatives from other schools like the Lee Kum Sheung Health and Happiness Center at the Harvard Chan School of Public Health and recent student initiatives and public conversations about minutes to the Harvard Kennedy School on the art of happiness. So this is a one Harvard initiative, and Harvard needs happiness. We're also interested in thinking through how Bhutan's gross national happiness focus can also supplement the Divinity School's growing Buddhist ministry initiatives and our multi-faith, inclusive environment.

Beyond Harvard in these challenging days in our nation and wider world, I'm reminded of the well-known statement in the American Declaration of Independence written by Thomas Jefferson back in 1776 almost a quarter of a millennium ago. And you will all know what this statement is. Quote, "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Alas, the United States is now ranked only 19 in the UN World Happiness index. Three places below Ireland.

[LAUGHTER]

Which makes me very happy.

[LAUGHTER]

There's actually, if there was more time, I once was a kind of 18th century constitutional historian. And figuring out how that phrase, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness got into the Declaration of Independence and where Thomas Jefferson got it from is an extremely interesting question.

But it is now my honor and pleasure to introduce this morning's keynote speaker and to get our conference underway. Her Excellency, Ambassador Doma Tshering, is the permanent representative of the Kingdom of Bhutan to the United Nations, and also accredited as Bhutan's ambassador to Canada and Brazil.

Ambassador Tshering is a career diplomat and a rising woman leader in the Kingdom. Prior to her new appointment in 2017, Ambassador Shearing was the director of the multi-lateral department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bhutan. She served as chief of the Foreign Ministry's Policy

Planning Division and the deputy permanent representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Switzerland.

She also served as first secretary and Bhutan's permanent mission to the United Nations in New York from 1995 to 2000. Ambassador Tshering graduated from the Ecole Nasional in Paris, France, with a diploma in public administration and international relations. She also holds a bachelor of arts degree from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota here in the United States. It is a real honor and great pleasure to welcome you to Harvard Divinity School this morning. And we look forward with much anticipation to your keynote address. Ambassador, Tshering, thank you for being here.

[APPLAUSE]

DOMA TSHERING: Very good morning and warm "kuzu zangpo" to all. Dean Hempton, thank you so very much for the kind introduction and the warm welcome I received this morning. The fact that so many of us are gathered here today and impressively, too, on a Saturday morning to exchange views on how happiness can shape a better world is a clear indication that the quest for happiness remains as relevant today as when the question was reflected upon centuries ago by some of the greatest social thinkers known to humanity.

I would like to congratulate the Harvard Divinity School and the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, the Saul O Sidore Foundation, for undertaking this initiative to host on Harvard's hallowed grounds this student-led conference on happiness. I thank Dasho Kinga Tshering and the Institute of Happiness for inviting me to share a few thoughts with you this morning.

Dear friends, let me start off my remarks with a full disclosure. I am not an expert on happiness. The real experts are amongst us this morning. Dasho Karma Tshiteem, chairperson of the Royal Civil Service Commission. In his previous manifestation, he served as the secretary of the Gross National Happiness Commission, Bhutan's national planning agency, which earned him the distinction of being the happiest of government secretaries.

[LAUGHTER]

Allow me to take advantage of this opportunity to thank Dasho as civil service chair for your tireless efforts to advance the happiness quotient of civil servants in Bhutan. I also wish to recognize Professor John Helliwell, professor emeritus of the Vancouver School of Economics University of British Columbia, and I believe Dr. Alejandro Adler of Columbia University is also here with us.

They are both members of the Global Happiness Council, instrumental in the production of the World Happiness Reports and its accompanying Global Happiness Policy Report. They were both closely associated with Bhutan's earlier work on the elaboration of gross national happiness as a new development paradigm.

I wish to also recognize Professor Vish Viswanath and Professor Laura Kbzansky, co-directors of the Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness at the Harvard T.H Chan School who yesterday brought together an exceptional group of academics, experts, and practitioners at a workshop on the subject of health and happiness in policy and practice across the globe. I am privileged to be in your midst.

So while not an expert like those present today who pursue happiness and those who seek to make a modest contribution to advance the happiness of others around us, I do consider myself a humble practitioner. So as a lay practitioner, and as representative of the royal government of Bhutan, I am delighted to join you and to share with you a little bit about Bhutan's national experience in pursuit of gross national happiness.

When most people hear Bhutan, the first thing that comes to mind is the happiest place on Earth. Dare I suggest with due respect to Professor Halliwell that this is not withstanding our ranking in the 2019 World Happiness Report. The Tourism Council of Bhutan whose epigram is happiness is a place would no doubt be very pleased with this. And as most Bhutanese nationals here today would agree, I would say that Bhutanese in general are a happy people.

However, when we speak of the concept of happiness or gross national happiness, we do not refer to the fleeting state of emotion. We speak of a development philosophy that has guided Bhutan's pursuit of progress for nearly the past five decades. When looking at the evolution of the development discourse at the global level, it was really only in the early 1990s that discussions on the need for a more holistic approach to development, one that probes beyond the confines of GDP, began to gain traction.

Discussions on sustainable development eventually led to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations in 2015. The fact that Bhutan embraced GNH as a driver of development as early as the 1960s when we embarked on the process of modern development is a matter of great pride for Bhutanese. In fact, GNH as a development framework has been institutionalized in the planning process since the ninth five-year plan period which was launched in 2002.

The concept of happiness as a holistic development paradigm is very close to our hearts in Bhutan. Our journey with GNH began nearly 47 years ago when his majesty the fourth King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, proclaimed that happiness rather than GNP should be the nation's principal yardstick for measuring progress. He believed if at the end of each of our five-year cycle-- cycle of five-year plans, the Bhutanese people were not happier, then our plans had failed.

The 18th century founder of unified Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, was more blunt. He pronounced in the 1729 legal code that if the government cannot create happiness for its people, there is no purpose for the government to exist. So you can understand why, in Bhutan, happiness has to be a serious business.

Gross national happiness is a multi-dimensional development approach that seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between material well-being and the spiritual, emotional, and cultural needs of our society. We see the purpose of development as being to create, through public policy, enabling conditions within which individuals can pursue happiness.

GNH is built on four interrelated and mutually reinforcing pillars; namely, sustainable and equitable socioeconomic development, preservation of culture, protection of the environment, and good governance. GNH is operationalized in Bhutan through the national development planning process, supported by two key tools. First, we have the nationwide GNH survey which is conducted every five years, the results of which inform elaboration and targeting of public policy.

The last one in 2015 found that overall, 43.3% of the Bhutanese people are deeply or extensively happy as opposed to narrowly happy or unhappy. These are extensive surveys. In 2015, surveyors fanned out across the country to reach out to respondents in some 8,000 randomly selected households. The GNH survey presents a great detail of information on various aspects of Bhutanese people's lives that are pertinent to well-being measurement and analysis. It can be used to generate policy recommendations as well as to inform different institutions on the achievements and issues in their areas or sectors of operation.

And second, we have the GNH policy screening tool, comprising of 9 domains and 33 indicators. Along with the four traditional socioeconomic measures of development, which are health, education, good governance, and living standards, where the index provides additional value is through the domains which gauge community vitality, psychological well-being, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, and finally, ecological diversity and resilience.

The nine domains developed by the Center for Bhutan Studies elaborate what, in Bhutan, are considered to be the fundamental conditions within which individuals may pursue happiness. Every draft policy project to be initiated by the government is subjected to the index to assess whether or not it will contribute to advancing the overall happiness of our people. Those that don't make the mark are sent back to the drawing board.

GNH serves as the conscience of the nation. It ensures that our policy and decision makers fulfill their obligations to our people, pursuing as His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has defined-- development with values. GNH values have meant that over the years, Bhutan has consistently invested 30% of our national budget on social development in the health and education sectors.

And the results over the last 30 years have borne fruit. During that period, life expectancy increased from 45 to 70. Infant mortality reduced from 140 out of 1,000 live births to 15. National literacy rates have increased from 40% to 72%, while youth literacy stands at 93%. In the last 15 years, income poverty has declined from 31% to 8%, while multi-dimensional poverty has declined to 5.8%. And while our national GDP is still modest at around \$2.4 billion USD, we have seen within 30 years, our per capita GDP grew from \$150 to \$3,500 today.

Allow me now to turn to another policy area to illustrate further how GNH values have driven Bhutan's policy decisions. Climate change has been internationally recognized as the defining challenge of our era. Many argue that climate change poses a threat to the core existence of humanity. Scientists have warned that unless we curb the current trajectory of global temperature rise to 1.5 degrees centigrade above pre-industrial levels, millions more people will be exposed to droughts, heat waves and floods, irreversible biodiversity loss, glaciers melting, and ocean warming that threatens life and the people who depend on these resources.

As a small, landlocked, developing country located in a fragile mountain ecosystem, Bhutan is among the most vulnerable countries in the world to the impacts of climate change, despite having contributed the least to its causes. In Bhutan, the impacts of climate change are already visible. In recent years, we have observed increase in erratic weather patterns, greater intensity of extreme weather events, leading to flash floods, windstorms, landslides, dwindling water sources, crop damage.

There is the growing threat of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods, GLOF, due to rapidly melting glaciers, potentially devastating for both infrastructure and human life. The two major drivers of our economy, namely, hydropower and agriculture, which are extremely climate-sensitive, are also under threat.

These will have serious effect on the sustainable livelihood of our people with direct impact on the economy, food security, public health, and infrastructure, as well as safety and security. Moreover, as a country that is scheduled to graduate from the least developed country category in 2023, we are acutely aware that the adverse effects of climate change threaten to reverse hard-earned development gains by decades.

Yet, in spite of our small size, our limited means, and the overwhelming compulsions and need for Bhutan as a least developed country to expand its revenue base in order to respond to the growing and increasingly varied needs of our people and economy, Bhutan continues to be recognized for the bold path it has chosen to tread both at the national and international levels. Difficult choices have been made, quick and potentially profitable ventures forgone, in order to ensure that our national policy decisions are pro-environment, respectful of our forests and biodiversity, sustainable, and consistent with a shift to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.

Inspired by the strong commitment of our monarchs to preserving our natural surroundings, it was to be expected that promotion and protection of our environment and safeguarding biodiversity would be enshrined in Bhutan's first constitution. Designation of every Bhutanese as a custodian only formalized a sense of reverence to nature that has always been deeply embedded in the Bhutanese psyche.

In this context, a number of policies, regulation, strategies, and action plans have been put in place in keeping with the core value of environmental conservation. We ensure all new policies and projects are

consistent with our international commitments. All the electricity produced in Bhutan through hydropower is clean and renewable. Low-impact, high-volume approach to tourism guards against the potentially negative effects of mass tourism. Aggressive waste transport and industry strategies along with mitigation measures in the sectors of human settlement, industry, and energy efficiency, lead us along a decarbonized development path.

Perhaps our most significant contribution, however, is maintaining over 71% of our total land area under forest cover. And this is well beyond the constitutional requirement to maintain 60% under forest coverage in perpetuity. Bhutan is a net carbon sink, and our forests have an estimated sequestration capacity of over 7 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually, easily capable of absorbing the 2.2 million tons we generate each year.

In fact, with our forests absorbing 2/3 more carbon emissions than we produce, Bhutan has exceeded our international pledge to remain carbon neutral, making us the only country that can currently claim this distinction. Protection of our forests also allows us to continue preserving one of the world's richest biological hotspots. With over 5,600 vascular plant species, more than 200 species of mammals, 770 species of birds, out of which dozens are endangered or globally threatened.

For a resource-constrained country like Bhutan, prioritizing preservation of our environment as a national goal and as a global good entails huge opportunity cost. Yet we recognize that climate change and its impacts imperils the sustainable livelihoods of our people and the conditions that Bhutanese consider as fundamental to an individual's pursuit of happiness, cutting across all nine domains of GNH. Protection and preservation of the environment will therefore always remain central in all government policies both at the national and international levels.

Dear friends, with the adoption in 2011 of a resolution led by Bhutan on happiness as a holistic development paradigm, the UN formally recognized for the very first time pursuit of happiness as a universal human goal. While perhaps not synonymous, there is strong resonance in convergence between GNH and current development models, particularly as they are articulated through the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Today, there is widespread recognition of the need for more holistic development frameworks that speak to the inter-linkages between the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of development and encompasses the human need for cultural vitality underpinned by inclusive participation and integrated approach.

An increasing number of governments are now broadening their focus beyond economic and fiscal policies. They and others now look at means to fine tune public policy to better respond to the needs of society and how they as governments can improve the lives of their citizens. Our discussions today will serve as a valuable contribution to that continuing discourse.

This morning, we began our proceedings with the Marchang, or traditional wine offering ceremony. This was intended not only to demonstrate a sacred vestige of Bhutan's ancient traditions, an integral component of our gross

national happiness, but also to engage collectively to invoke local deities and guardians to remove all obstacles so that our endeavors today may meet with success.

In that same spirit, as I convey the fervent wishes of the royal government of Bhutan for the success of our discussions, let me also suggest that we all reflect further on whether or not public policy formulation today responds to that most fundamental of human aspirations-- the pursuit of happiness, and also our desire for a better world. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

KINGA TSHERING: Thank you very much, your excellency, for this wonderful opening keynote address that has actually set the course and defined the discussion goals for the rest of the day. On behalf of the friends, the organizers, honorable dean, faculty, and all the participants here, we would like to express our humble gratitude for your excellency's keynote address.

And I think among so many other things, the relationship that we have with our ecology, our nature and biodiversity-- and actually, I didn't know that our excellency was so-- I think a lot of expertise in biodiversity and natural heritage. And in fact, our advisor, my advisor in one of the classes that we have-- not me, of course. To all the smart students who always says, you should come and teach the class. And I think with your permission, my advisor, I think you should invite her excellency to come and teach on all the classes. So thank you so much.

Next, I would like to introduce to you a group of our friends who have come all the way from New York City. They're from the Bhutanese community. And they would like to participate not only in the conference, but also perform a cultural program and a dance to all of us here. Because as you are aware, preservation of culture and promotion of culture is one of the pillars of GNH in Bhutan. And they'll be sharing a sample of what is a regular performance on every occasion in Bhutan. So please, let me join all of you to thank our friends who are taking their time away from work and joining us to perform this cultural dance. So let's give them a big hand of applause.

[APPLAUSE]

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

[APPLAUSE]

KINGA TSHERING: Thank you so much, our friends from New York City. And I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all my other friends and organizers who have traveled all the way, some from Australia, some from Bhutan. So most of them are standing at the back. So you can catch them whenever you have time to discuss more on GNH and they're experience in Bhutan. So if you don't mind. please give them a round of applause.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]