



Asian Parliamentary Assembly

Report of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs

**1 September 2017
Thimphu, Bhutan**

**SC- Social&Cultural/Rep/2017/05
1 September 2017**

1. The Meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural affairs convened at 9:00 hours on Thursday, 31 August 2017 in Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan.
2. Delegations from Afghanistan, Kingdom of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kingdom of Cambodia, Cyprus, India, Indonesia, I.R. of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Lao PDR, Nepal, I.R. of Pakistan, Russia, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, UAE and Vietnam attended this meeting. The List of Participants is annexed to this report.
3. In Inaugural Ceremony, there were five speakers as follows:
 - Welcome remarks by H.E. Mr. Tshogpon Jigme Zangpo, Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan.
 - Remarks by H.E. Dr. Majidi, Secretary General of APA.
 - Remarks by H.E. Dr. NGuon Nehl, High Representative of APA President.
 - Remarks by Honorable Mr. Gerald Daly, Resident Coordinator of UN.
 - Speech of the Guest of Honor, H.E. Mr. Lyonchen Tobgay, Prime Minister of Bhutan.The texts of speeches are attached.
4. The Photo Session took place and the Agenda was adopted. H.E. Dr. Tabatabaee, Deputy Secretary General of APA proposed that the Speaker of National Assembly of Bhutan chairs the meeting on the basis of APA tradition. The proposal was endorsed by the Member Parliaments by acclamation. Honorable Mr. Zangpo presided over the meeting as the Chairman. Honorable General Nipat Thonglek of Thailand was elected as



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the Vice-Chairman and Honorable Mr. Yara Suos from Cambodia as Rapporteur.

5. The Chairman delivered his welcoming remarks and thanked all of the attending delegations for placing their trust in his competence as Chairman.
6. The meeting of APA Women Parliamentarians Committee was convened and had its deliberations. Statements were also presented by the participants. The statements were mainly in support of the promotion of the status of women and condemned all sorts of violence against women in Asia. Many delegations made references to the high position and responsibilities of women in parliaments and public administrations. The meeting considered and discussed the draft resolution on APA Woman Parliamentarians and concluded the discussions.
7. The Chairman opened the discussions on the topics concerning the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs and asked the participants to consider each draft resolution and make observations accordingly. The views and opinions of all delegates are reflected in the annexed set of draft resolutions.
8. There were some reservations by the delegates on a part of the resolutions as follows:
 - Iran on “FATF-style regional bodies” of the Smuggling of Cultural Items Resolution.
 - Thailand on “without any cost to the original owner country” of the same resolution.
 - Iran on “harmonizing law” of the Drug Trafficking Resolution.
 - India on addressing Myanmar in the Humanitarian Aid Resolution.
9. The names and the titles of the resolutions are as follows:
 - Draft Resolution on Measures to Promote Cultural Diversity and Protect Cultural Heritage in Asia.
 - Draft Resolution on Asian Integration through Information and Communication Technology.



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- Draft Resolution on Collaboration on Health Equity in Asia.
 - Draft Resolution on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in Asia.
 - Draft Resolution on Asian Parliamentarians against Corruption.
 - Draft Resolution on APA Women Parliamentarians.
 - Draft Resolution on Promoting Inter-Faith Dialogue and Harmony among World Religions.
 - Draft Resolution on Legal and Legislative Cooperation in Combating the Smuggling of Cultural Items in Asia.
 - Draft Resolution on Effective Cooperation in Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking in Asia.
 - Draft Resolution on Humanitarian Aid to Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Myanmar on the Verge of a Humanitarian Catastrophe.
10. The texts of the ten draft resolutions were adopted unanimously by the participating APA Member Delegations in the meeting. The ten draft resolutions of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs will be submitted to the Executive Council and the Tenth Plenary for final adoption.
11. The Closing Session was held in the evening of Friday September 1, 2017 and presided by Honorable Dasho Dr. Sonam Kinga, Chairperson of the National Council of Bhutan. The report of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs and the draft resolutions were presented to the meeting. All delegations thanked the Kingdom of Bhutan for hosting the meeting and the hospitality to the delegations.

10 Draft Resolutions
As Adopted by the
APA Standing Committee on
Social and Cultural Affairs
In Bhutan
1st September 2017



Draft Resolution on Measures to Promote Cultural Diversity and Protect Cultural Heritage in Asia

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/15
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling APA Resolutions, APA/Res/2013/05; APA/Res/2010/05; APA/Res/2009/05; APA/Res/2008/17; and APA/Res/2007/02; on Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity in Asia;

Considering the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954, and its protocols;

Recognizing the significant role of parliaments both in safeguarding their respective national cultural heritage and in harmonizing Asian approach in respect of cultural diversity;

Emphasizing that cultural diversity is dependent on protection of cultural heritage, and the existence of common grounds among Asian ancient civilizations provide solid grounds for co-existence and co-operation among nations in the region;

Re-affirming that cultural heritage is a fundamental component of the cultural identity of a people and their social cohesion, and its disrespect, damage or destruction may have adverse consequences for human dignity and human rights; particularly the rights of marginalized communities;

Recognizing that tolerance is one of the fundamental values of humanity, which entails promotion of cultural diversity, culture of peace, and dialogue among civilizations;

Recognizing the increasing importance of culture, as an integral part of development plans of all nations in Asia and beyond;

Promoting greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions by means of concrete projects in the priority areas of youth, education, and media, in collaboration with governments, international and regional organizations, in line with the outcome of the first World Cultural Forum, in Bali, Indonesia in November 2013 and document entitled “Bali Declaration on the Alliance of Civilizations”, held in Bali, Indonesia, in 29 and 30 August 2014;

Reiterating that multicultural dynamism in Asia provides as an indispensable asset for making a strong Asian community based on mutual respect and recognition of all Asian cultures and civilizations;

Noting the opportunities offered by globalization for greater interaction among cultures and civilizations, as well as challenges brought about by its trends to preserving and celebrating the rich intellectual and cultural diversity in Asia;

Considering the smuggling of cultural objects from Asia a threat to the richness of Asian cultural heritage, and underline the important role of parliaments to both raise public awareness about this challenge and to strengthen, where necessary;

Deploring the un-repairable damage brought to cultural and religious heritage by terrorism and organized crimes, especially damages to Muslim and Christian historical sites and holy shrines and mosques by indiscriminate bombing and shelling in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan by ISIS and other terrorist groups;

Expressing grave concerns regarding theft, damage, or destruction to any place of worship of any religion, any cultural, religious, or historical heritage in Asia;

1. **Determine** to encourage and promote further intercultural dialogue and inter-religious exchanges throughout Asia;
2. **Resolve** to appreciate and promote the benefits of diversity in Asian nations, and encourage values such as justice, human rights, non-discrimination, democracy and respect within and among communities and nations;
3. **Reject** all manifestations of discrimination that are based on racism, racial and caste discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance;
4. **Remain Committed** to the protection of the rights of indigenous and ethnic communities so as to ensure the fulfillment of indigenous community rights in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
5. **Urge** relevant governmental agencies to further facilitate consular services as appropriate for citizens of Asian countries to allow for greater people-to-people interaction;
6. **Acknowledge** that illegal import, export and transfer of ownership of cultural property and artifacts is responsible for the impoverishment of the cultural identity of the countries of origin of such property;
7. **Decide** to remain cognizant of damages to Muslim and Christian holy places and historical sites by ISIS terrorist organization in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan;
8. **Urge** Member Parliaments to consider ratifying the International Convention for the Safeguarding of World Natural and Cultural Heritage and the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage;
9. **Call Upon** APA Member Parliaments to consider drafting a model legislation to combat smuggling of cultural objects in Asia;

10. **Call Upon** all Member Parliaments to promote tolerance and empathy among Asian nations with a view to diminish distrust, misunderstanding, and conflict among religious communities;
11. **Call Upon** APA Member Parliaments to support establishing an award to be presented annually to outstanding Asian artists; authors, poets, film makers, painters, etc, who best convey the APA's commitment to cultural diversity in Asia;
12. **Condemn** all forms of contemptuous actions against religions, holy books, religious places and personalities and religious rituals;
13. **Reiterate** that during armed conflict, states should adopt measures to safeguard the cultural and historical heritage of a nation in conformity with international law and the principles and objectives of international agreements and UNESCO recommendations concerning the protection of such heritage during hostilities;
14. **Reiterate** that Member Parliaments should adopt measures to safeguard and restore the cultural and historical heritage of nations in conformity with International law and the principles of objectives of international agreements and UNESCO recommendations concerning the protection of such heritage during hostilities, including those caused by conflicts and violent extremism;
15. **Request** the APA Secretary General to uphold cooperation between APA and international and regional organizations such as UNESCO, United Nations Alliance of Civilizations(UNAOC), ISESCO and relevant Asian NGOs active in promoting cultural diversity and dialogue among civilizations;
16. **Request** the Secretary General to work with the Universities in the Asian region to do researches and studies on the identification and promotion of common cultural aspects of the Asian countries;
17. **Request** the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member Parliaments on their efforts to implement this resolution;



Draft Resolution on Asian Integration through Information and Communication Technology

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/16
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Reaffirming that right to access to information is an integral part of the fundamental right of freedom of expression, as recognized by Resolution 59 of the UN General Assembly adopted in 1946, as well as by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).

Recalling para.5 of article 3 of the Charter of the APA;

Recalling APA Resolution, APA/ Res/ 2014/11, and APA/Res/2014/13;

Underlining that Asian integration can be achieved through further dialogue, interaction, and communication among Asian people, parliamentarians, government officials, academic and educational institutions, and media for the promotion of peace, liberty, equality, human rights, and welfare in Asia;

Concerned with negative impact of globalization on widening the gap between the rich and poor in Asia, and the further marginalization of developing countries in the world;

Recognizing the fact that today Asia encompasses the biggest market in the world, the highest number of population; the largest amount of foreign currency reserves; and dynamic economic growth

Re-affirming the deep-rooted ties of history, geography, economics, culture, and civilization that bind Asian peoples together and the common interests pointing to the need for further cooperation;

Emphasizing the principle of free flow of information, on privacy protection, equitable access to communication, and access to new technologies at the national, regional and global levels;

Underlining the fundamental role of information technology as an indispensable factor in all areas of national; regional, and global development;

Stressing the view that global networking provides opportunities for APA Member Parliaments to share experiences and engage in fruitful dialogue on significant issues in Asia and facilitates further cooperation and coordination, on the way of Asian integration process;

Underlining that the Asian Virtual Parliament will pave the way for sharing information, harmonizing legislation and raising people’s awareness about the activities of the legislative body and ensure a more profound feedback between society, power and individuals, and thus contribute to strengthening peace in Asia;

Emphasizing that, the role of parties, civil society, non- governmental organizations (NGOs) and other democratic structures in public sphere, provide opportunities in Asian countries for exchange of views, interactions and synergy to promote regional and global cooperation in order to reinforce the long term process for Asian Integration.

1. **Call Upon** APA Member Parliaments to volunteer for providing knowledge and know-how, technical assistance, financial support, human resources; and other form of assistance in creating a “Virtual Asian Parliament” based on the report by the APA Secretary General on the subject matter in order to enhance collaboration and interaction among parliaments and parliamentarians in Asia and as a prelude to establishing a model Asian parliament;
2. **Determine** all the modern and traditional ways to help complete the plan to promote, publicize and disseminate information amongst citizens within the APA region; including the use of social media;
3. **Call Upon** APA Member Parliaments to support vocational and knowledge-based education in Asia in order to enhance people’s life-skills and competitiveness in coping with the challenges of globalization;
4. **Urge** APA Member Parliaments to share best practices and exchange experiences with a view to inspiring a common approach toward Asian integration through holding special workshops and forums among Asian Member Parliaments;
5. **Call upon** the UN and its affiliated organizations, particularly UNESCO, to support the Members of this Assembly surmount the hurdles, identified by research centers, think tanks and intellectuals, hampering circulation of ideas through available means for free flow of communication and information;
6. **Request** the Secretary-General to seek possible technical and financial assistance from Member Parliaments and other institutions to facilitate the implementation of this resolution and prepare a report with comprehensive approach to accelerate the process of Asian Integration.



Draft Resolution on Collaboration on Health Equity in Asia

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/17
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling APA Resolutions, APA/Res/2013/07; APA/Res/2010/02; and APA/Res/2009/06;

Recalling the advises in the report of the Secretary-General on Achieving Health Equity in Asia, SG/Rep/2011/02 Dated 22 August 2011, submitted to the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran on 13-14 September, 2011;

Taking note of diversity of health equity status among countries in Asia;

Stressing the view that global net-working provides opportunities for Member Parliaments to engage in fruitful dialogue and exchange of best practices on health equity;

Reaffirming the significant role of parliaments both in advocating and promoting national policies and legislative measures for achieving health equity;

Welcoming the Sustainable Development Goals adopted on 25 September 2015 and reaffirming its pivotal role in enhancement of the health equity;

Welcoming the Political Declaration of the High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases, adopted on 19 September 2011, reaffirming the political will to effectively implement the commitments contained therein and referring to the outcome document of the high-level meeting of the UN General Assembly on the comprehensive review and assessment of the progress achieved in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases;

Recalling United Nation General Assembly resolution 66/288 on “The future we want”, which recognized health as a precondition for and an outcome and indicator of all three dimensions of sustainable development;

Recalling the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health endorsed by the Sixty-fifth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA65.8 in May 2012;

Recalling the importance of placing equity and human centered policies in the core of health agenda and noting central role of enabling Universal Health Coverage to provide equitable access to quality health services without financial hardship and access to quality affordable medicine and medical technologies;

Recognizing that health inequities arise from social determinants of health, that is, the societal conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and that these determinants include experiences in their early years, education, economic status, employment and decent work, housing and environment, and effective systems of preventing and treating ill health;

Emphasizing the need to comprehensively deal with social and health related problems emanating from drug and substances abuse and low quality drugs;

Expressing concern about the existing socio-economic inequalities and their impact on the poor and marginalized groups, as well as the remote geographical areas and underserved urban areas;

Expressing concern on deteriorating health effects of wars and armed conflicts by hindering provision and quality of health service and causing deprivation from fundamental human rights prospective to health, due to the inequalities in access and utilization of qualified health services.

1. **Welcome** the Report of the Secretary-General contained in SG/Rep/ 2014/02 dated 10 August, 2014;
2. **Underline** the report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health for addressing the impact of socio-economic inequalities on health at global, regional and national levels;
3. **Urge** the APA Member Parliaments to incorporate the issue of Social Determinants of Health (SDH) more intensively in other APA themes and activities;
4. **Urge** the APA Member Parliaments to strengthen collaboration among themselves with a view to formulating a coherent approach with regard to social determinants of health in Asia, especially education, housing, and employment;
5. **Invite** the APA Member Parliaments to promote health equity in Asia through sharing experiences and best practices on identifying vulnerability and inequity and actively advocate the inclusion of social determinants of health in national policies and programs;
6. **Further invite** APA member Parliaments to develop a cross-sectoral collaboration for the advancement of health equity in Asia through comprehensive training and study exchanges on social determination of health (SDH) among policy makers and related stake holders;
7. **Urge** the APA Member Parliaments to adopt policies and measures to improve service provision, and health financing system including social protection system as well as health insurance plans for a more equitable resource distribution;

- 8. Call on** Member Parliaments of APA to encourage their respective governments in order to establish networking among major governmental and non-governmental institutions dealing with health issues in Asia, and expand cooperation with academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups and the media with adequate safeguard in order to identify the main social determinants of health;
- 9. Call upon** APA Member Parliaments to persuade their respective governments to create and implement more sharpened and targeted policies, activities, and programs to ensure a success in the achievement of SDGs including universal health coverage with regard to health policies; and promoting access to quality, efficacious, safe and affordable medicines and medical technologies;
- 10. Call on** APA Member Parliaments to take necessary actions and to encourage their respective governments to ensure child nutrition needs with a focus on equity in order to create better a generation;
- 11. Determine** to take active part on the discussion of post-2030 development agenda by delivering Asian views in the international arena to drive the global agenda;
- 12. Encourage** the APA Member Parliaments to actively participate in the process of arriving at common objectives which could form the basis of national legislations promoting health equity in Asia, with due attention to equitable social protection policies for health care, long term disability, and protection during unemployment and old age, as appropriate in the national context and priorities;
- 13. Request** Member Parliaments to inform the Secretary-General on the progress made on the implementation of this resolution in their respective countries in order to share them with all Member Parliaments.



Draft Resolution on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in Asia

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/18
1 September 2017

Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly representing signatory states who are parties to the relevant international conventions and agreements;

Acknowledging that the development of migrant workers and the protection of their rights are in line with the principles of human rights and contribute to the development and promotion of friendly relations among countries;

Recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other relevant international instruments to which the States members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly are parties;

Noting that the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 97 on Migration for Employment, ILO Convention 143 on Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provision), established a broad legal framework for the protection of migrant workers;

Taking note of the importance of ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers;

Acknowledging the significance of ILO Conventions concerning the protection of the rights of migrant workers as well as UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime – 2000 in promoting human rights of Asian migrant workers without prejudice to their sex, race, language, religion, nationality, or ethnic origin;

Noting the adoption of ILO Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers at the 100th International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference in Geneva, 2011 as a global recognition on the existence of domestic workers where many of them are migrants;

Underlining the importance of establishing a national legal framework as well as a broad legal framework for the protection of migrant workers and noting the legal and illegal status of different cases;

Deeply concerned with the precarious conditions faced by migrant workers such as human rights abuse, harassment and violence, discrimination, low pay and low status jobs, unpaid jobs, and overwork;

Underlining the challenges that women migrant workers are facing such as forced confinement, low pay, non-payment, excessive working hours, physically strenuous activities and sexual harassment and abuse, human trafficking and migrant smuggling, and prostitution;

Recognizing that unsettled status of immigrants prevents the establishment of conditions for full scale and comprehensive protection of their right by governments of sending and receiving countries;

Emphasizing that adaptation of labour immigrants to local conditions and working activity in destination states as well as integration into recipient society are important factors which contribute to effective exercise of the rights of labour immigrants;

Acknowledging the contribution of migrant workers to the society and economy of both receiving and sending states and their input to the development and prosperity of the region;

Bearing in mind the importance of friendly relationships and cooperation among governments, parliaments and the peoples of Asia insolving the problems relating to Asian migrant workers; and in particular, providing repatriation assistance services such as coordination with families, airport assistance, domestic transport, temporary shelter, medical and rehabilitation services;

Recognizing the significant role of parliaments both in strengthening social and human rights policies, and in harmonizing an Asian approach on protecting the rights of migrant workers in Asia;

Confirming that providing adequate measures on the protection and promotion of the rights of migrant workers in Asia is part of a shared responsibility among Asian Countries toward a common vision for security and prosperity which focused on the improvement of the quality of life of its people;

Concerned with the mass exodus of people who have tried to flee from their homelands in Asia to some European countries, due to lack or deficiency of security, food, health service, accommodation, employment and so forth; many of whom are young migrant workers;

Noting with great concern that ethnic and other forms of intolerance are the major causes of forced migration;

1. **Encourage** APA Member Parliaments to consider accession to the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of

their Families to stress Asian commitment on the protection of the rights of migrant workers and humanitarian issues in Asia;

2. **Call upon** APA Member Parliaments to enhance and harmonize their actions towards a better protection of migrant workers, especially women and children;
3. **Request** APA sending countries to provide migrant workers with adequate skills and knowledge in order to be able to fulfill their task and understand the culture, prevailing laws and regulation in the receiving countries;
4. **Urge** APA Member Parliaments to ensure that their domestic laws shall be fair and just, equally applicable to both migrant workers and citizens who violate the laws;
5. **Encourage** the promotion of bilateral and regional cooperation among countries in all areas and issues of migrant workers to maximize the potential benefits and minimize the negative impacts of migration;
6. **Encourage** the respective States of the APA Member Parliaments to consider bilateral, or regional agreements including Mandatory Consular Notification Agreement under the spirit of Vienna Convention on Consular Relations; whereby the sending countries are well informed on the legal problems faced by their migrant workers;
7. **Emphasize** the importance of involving civil society, non-government organizations, and increasing their opportunity for participation and interaction with stakeholders to develop better policies and supervise the implementation of regulations on migrant workers issues;
8. **Recommend** APA Member Parliaments to provide adequate information on regulation, legislation and policies related to migrant workers in their respective countries, and to share information and best practices as well as opportunities and challenges encountered by Asian countries in relation to the protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights and welfare;
9. **Urge** the APA relevant member countries to promote fair and proper working conditions, proper minimum wages, and adequate access to decent living conditions for migrant workers.
10. **Request** the Secretary-General to coordinate with APA Member Parliaments on the progress to implement this resolution and submit a report thereon to the meeting of the Standing committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.



Draft Resolution on Asian Parliamentarians Against Corruption

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/19
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling APA Resolutions on Combating Corruption contained in APA/Res/2013/09, December 2013; APA/Res/2010/01; APA/Res/2009/03; APA/Res/2008/18; as well as the APA Plan of Action on Combating Corruption contained in APA/Res/2007/05/Annex;

Taking note of the importance of the UN Convention against Corruption adopted by the General Assembly on October 31, 2003 and other anti-corruption conventions and relevant binding legal instruments;

Recognizing that fighting corruption at all levels is a priority and that corruption is a serious barrier to effective resource mobilization and allocation and diverts resources away from activities that are vital for poverty eradication and sustainable development;

Reaffirming the importance of respect for human rights, the rule of law, good governance, and democracy in the fight against corruption;

Recognizing the important role of parliaments to promote transparency, participation, accountability and integrity as some of the principles of anti-corruption strategy;

Acknowledging that the fight against all forms of corruption requires comprehensive anti-corruption frameworks and strong institutions at all levels;

Expressing concern about the laundering and transfer of stolen assets and proceeds of corruption, and stressing the need to address this concern in accordance with the UN Convention against Corruption;

1. **Condemn** corruption at all levels and in all its forms, including bribery; money laundering; and abuse of power;

2. **Express** determination to prevent and combat corrupt practices in all forms and collaborate on facilitating asset recovery and returning such assets to their legitimate owners, in particular to countries of origin, in accordance with the United Nations Convention against Corruption;
3. **Welcome** the significant number of Member States that have already ratified or acceded to the Convention, and in this regard urges all APA Member Parliaments that have not yet done so to consider ratifying or acceding to the United Nations Convention against Corruption as a matter of priority, and urges all States parties to the Convention to take appropriate measures ensuring its full and effective implementation;
4. **Decide** to set up a working group under the auspices of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs to further consider the APA Plan of Action on Combating Corruption contained in APA/Res/2007/05/ Annex with a view to taking effective measures for enhancing synergy and interactions among Asian Parliamentarians in fighting corruption.
5. **Consider** to improve and expand working relations with important Asian organizations such as ARPAC, SEAPAC, SAPAC, and GOPAC Chapter in order to enhance synergy and areas for cooperation and joint initiatives;
6. **Urges** States parties to United Nations Convention against Corruption that have not already done so to designate a central authority that shall have the responsibility and power to receive requests for mutual legal assistance and either to execute them or to transmit them to the competent authorities for execution;
7. **Request** the Secretary-General to prepare in consultation with interested APA Delegations, particularly APA delegates with interest and experience in anti-corruption efforts, the required draft documents for consideration by the working group set up in this respect;
8. **Request** also the Secretary-General to seek the views of Member Parliaments on implementation of this resolution.



Draft Resolution on APA Women Parliamentarians

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/20
1 September 2017

We, members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling the APA Plenary Resolution (APA/Res/2010/06, 30 November, 2010) on the establishment of the Coordinating Meeting of APA Women Parliamentarians;

Mindful of the fact that despite all efforts made for the promotion of women's rights, gender inequality and injustice still persists between women and men both in the extent of power at decision-making and in mechanisms to promote the advancement of women;

Aware of the importance of promoting the participation of women in scientific, social, political, cultural and economic affairs, and peace dialogue;

Reaffirming that inclusion of women in positions of power and elected bodies, and also their involvement in the decision making process, strengthens the development of democratic principles in public life and increases the economic development;

Noting that the main obstacles women face in entering Parliaments in Asia including political, socio-economic, cultural prejudices;

Mindful of the necessity to put on the agenda of APA meetings matters of importance to women such as combating violence against women, empowerment of women in society, participation of women in political life, and prevention of all kind of harassments, sexual violence against women and girls, including in situation of armed conflicts if applicable;

Stressing our resolve to participate and contribute actively in the deliberation of issues relating to women's empowerment and women's participation in APA meetings;

Underlining the need to facilitate networking between women parliamentarians of Asia;

1. **Encourage** APA Member Parliaments to ensure the inclusion and effective participation of women in social, cultural, economic, political, and sustainable

development affairs in Asia, at national, regional, and international levels as appropriate.

2. **Encourage** Member Parliaments to adopt legislative regulations to facilitate women's representations in Asian Parliaments;
3. **Recommend** the inclusion of at least one woman parliamentarian in APA delegations;
4. **Encourage** APA Member Parliaments to recognize the concerns of women, and to effectively implement the relevant provisions of United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which promote gender equality and empowerment, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, full and productive employment, and building accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
5. **Encourage** APA Member Parliaments to recognize that gender equality and empowerment of women must be established as a standing-alone goal and must be achieved simultaneously with *goal 5* of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG);
6. **Determine** to enhance the activities of the Coordinating Meeting of APA Women Parliamentarian through more effective exchange of views and close interaction;
7. **Require** the Special Committee of APA Women Parliamentarians to expand the scope of its activities under the auspices of Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs and to take appropriate measures to facilitate networking among women parliamentarians in Asia;
8. **Request** the APA Secretariat to assign one part of the website of the Assembly to facilitate networking among women parliamentarians of Asia covering updated information on the activities of the APA Women Parliamentarians;
9. **Express** concern at the dire situation of millions of women in all war-torn and conflict-ridden areas such as Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Myanmar, and Afghanistan who are in danger of violence, killing, rape, and captivity;
10. **Request** the Secretary-General seek the views of Member parliaments on this resolution and submit a report thereon to the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.



Draft Resolution on Promoting Inter- Faith Dialogue and Harmony among World Religions

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/21
1 September 2017

We the members of Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling with appreciation various global, regional and sub-regional initiatives on mutual understanding and interfaith harmony including the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/65/PV.34, and also resolution 57/6 of 4 November 2002 concerning the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, the International Conference on Environment, Peace and the Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures, held in Tehran on 9 and 10 May 2005, the Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Dialogue on the theme "Building Interfaith Harmony within the International Community", held in Bali, Indonesia, on 21 and 22 July 2005, the High Level Conference on International and Inter-Religious Dialogue, held in Saint Petersburg, Russia on 3 and 4 July 2014, and the sixth global Forum of the United Nations alliance of Civilizations, held in Bali, Indonesia on 29 and 30 August 2014;

Mindful of the fact that, Inter-Faith harmony between the different religions of the world in general and Asia, in particular, is of utmost importance for the survival of mankind and the promotion of the culture of peace, security and tolerance;

Recognizing the essential role of dialogue among different faiths and religions in enhancing mutual collaboration, harmony and cooperation among nations of the world;

Expressing the need to explore ways and means to intensify Inter- Faith Harmony and resultant cooperation to strengthen the international peace and security to make the world a better place to live;

Admitting that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions and beliefs call for peace, tolerance and mutual understanding;

- 1. Urge** all parliaments to support and spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill, as such mutual understanding constitutes important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace;

2. **Maintain** that a regular dialogue between the parliaments of APA could become an effective supplement for addressing the challenges of international ongoing conflicts based on religious differences and discrepancies;
3. **Denounce** stereotyping of any religious, national or ethnic group and condemn any intentional and unintentional activity that leads towards the division between the followers of different faiths;
4. **Urge** all Member Parliaments to harmonize their efforts in promulgating laws and legislations in Asia for improved standards of cooperation between the nations to enhance the patience for the religious beliefs of others;
5. **Declare** that terrorism, extremism and violence have no religion nor any borders, as these are common enemy of all humanity;
6. **Consider** any form of xenophobia based on belief, faith or ethnic adherence contrary to the merits of inter-faith dialogue has no place in the community of civilized nations;
7. **Encourage** parliaments of APA to exert their utmost effort for providing a respective national legal instrument, with aim of creating a conducive atmosphere for inter-faith dialogue and cooperation as well harmony among world religions;
8. **Deplore**, in the strongest terms, all atrocities and acts of violence, committed by extremist and terrorist groups under the guise of Islam which hold no authentic reference to Islamic principles and no legitimacy among Muslims all around the world, and call upon all states to refrain from providing any support to such groups;
9. **Condemn** the misuse and distortion of religious beliefs, by extremist groups and their followers, which inflame intra-faith as well as inter-faith hatred and hold them accountable for instigation of ill-judgment, violence, and brutality against other faithful people;
10. **Call Upon** the international community to be cognizant of humanitarian situations in Asia;
11. **Urge** all Member Parliaments to intensify their efforts in utilizing parliamentary diplomacy for the development of international and regional frameworks to promote best practices which leads towards the inter faith harmony and collaboration;
12. **Request** the Secretary-General to seek the views as well as measures taken by APA Member Parliaments to implement this resolution and to report thereon to the next meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.



Draft Resolution on Legal and Legislative Cooperation in Combating the Smuggling of Cultural Items in Asia

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/22
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling APA/Resolution/2013/05 of 9 December 2013 on Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity in Asia;

Expressing support for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 prohibiting the smuggling of cultural items by terrorist groups, including from Iraq and Syria;

Welcoming the important and active role that the UN, Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and FATF-style regional bodies play in countering money laundering and terrorist financing linked to trade in smuggled artifacts, in particular, in Asia;

Expressing deep concern about the growing problem of smuggling of cultural items in Asia;

Affirming the important role of parliaments to develop a national strategy including a legal framework to combat smuggling of cultural items;

Considering the smuggling of cultural objects from Asia a threat to the richness of Asian cultural heritage;

Recognizing the role of parliaments to enhance public awareness about the threat to national identity and heritage of states from which cultural items are smuggled abroad;

Recognizing also the need to enhance national capacities, including parliamentary capacity to reinforce national strategy to combat smuggling of cultural items;

1. **Urge** all APA Member Parliaments to utilize their legislative powers to prevent and punish the smuggling of cultural objects in Asia and facilitate concerted efforts to return the stolen items back to their original locations without any cost to the original owner country;

2. **Call on** all APA member parliaments that have not yet done so to consider ratifying the International Convention for the Safeguarding of World Natural and Cultural Heritage, and the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage;
3. **Request** all APA Member Parliaments to consider and contribute to drafting of a common legislation on protecting and safeguarding cultural objects and combating all forms and aspects of trafficking cultural property and related offences to be enacted on the basis of the principles prepared by APA Secretariat and annexed to this resolution, and in accordance with their own internal legislative procedures;
4. **Request** the Secretary-general to follow up preparation of a common legislation on combating the smuggling of cultural items in Asia by APA Member Parliaments.

Annex

Principles for Drafting Common Legislation by Asian Parliaments Concerning the Smuggling of Cultural Items

1. Lawful exchange of cultural and historical properties enriches cultural and social existence of nations; strengthens mutual respect and leads to amity and friendship among them;
2. Movable cultural heritage of every nation is considered as fundamental elements of culture and civilization of that nation, and an integral part of regional and human culture and civilization and thus necessitates regional cooperation to fight theft and smuggling of cultural properties.
3. Protection and safeguarding of historical cultural properties from the perils of unlawful excavations, theft and smuggling, is inter alia the duty of the governments.
4. Clandestine excavations in archeological sites, theft, illicit import and export of cultural properties constitutes as one of the main reasons for the cultural impoverishment of the countries of the origin of these objects.
5. Establishment and strengthening of a proper system of management to protect immovable cultural heritage and reinforce coordination and cooperation among concerned institutions for combating theft and smuggling of cultural properties.
6. Documentation, preparation and completion of an inventory of national cultural properties.
7. Proper supervision over archeological excavations, standardization of the means to protect cultural items at the site of discovery.
8. Taking educational steps to enhance public awareness on the necessity of protecting cultural objects.
9. Encouraging and developing the educational, scientific and technical institutions required for protecting cultural items, expanding museums, supporting cooperation and exchanging cultural objects among museums in Asian countries.
10. Issuing special permit for those cultural objects the export of which is authorized; and thwarting illicit import and export of cultural items with no permit, and restitution thereof to the country of origin.

11. Promoting international cooperation to combat smuggling of cultural items with the countries of origin on restitution of cultural properties as well as extradition of those charged with theft and smuggling of cultural items.
12. Stress on the inalienable right of every country concerning classification and declaring as non-transferable certain cultural properties and preventing entry into the national territory of those items.



Draft Resolution on Effective Cooperation in Combating Illicit Drug Trafficking in Asia

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/23
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Recalling the report of the Standing Committee meeting on Social and Cultural Affairs held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, on 13-14 September 2011;

Mindful of the fact that illicit drug trafficking and its negative impact on health, safety, public order, governance, economic development and social health constitutes a prime concern in Asia and deserves a comprehensive consideration by the APA;

Stressing the need to continue to take concentrated measures within the framework of the Paris Pact in order to strengthen cross-border cooperation and information exchanged with a view to countering illicit cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs in Asia;

Emphasizing that the danger of illicit drug trafficking is so pervasive that may undermine international peace, security, and stability and there is an urgent need to mobilize efforts of all countries to curb the production of opium and heroin in Afghanistan and to dismantle networks of illicit drug trafficking from that country;

Acknowledging that the States most affected by the transit of drugs, especially the developing countries among them, have made important contributions to and sacrifices in countering illicit drug trafficking and preventing illicitly trafficked substances from region and markets;

Emphasizing afresh the continuing need to provide concrete, sufficient and sustainable technical and capacity- building support to the States most affected by the transit of drugs, especially the developing countries among them, in their efforts to curb illicit drug trafficking and deal with associated challenges;

Recognizing that production and illicit trafficking of narcotics drugs can be utilized for financing of other organized crimes, including terrorism;

Expressing the need to explore ways and means to intensify regional coordination among legislators to combat drug trafficking and make anti-drug policies a priority in programs of co-

operation with, and of assistance to, the Asian countries which are affected by illicit drug trafficking;

Recognizing the interconnected challenges facing Asian countries, including continued illegal cultivation, production and trafficking of narcotic drugs that pose a serious threat to the region;

Expressing the need to increase international and regional support for the capacity building of law-enforcement agencies in Afghanistan, and to intensify training programs for Afghan law-enforcement staff;

Further recognizing the importance of “Alternative Development” program as an approach to reducing the cultivation of plants containing drug substances through rural development measures that has been strongly endorsed by UN Commission on Narcotic Drug;

Stressing the need to enhance joint operations with the relevant Afghan law-enforcement agencies focusing on clandestine heroin-producing laboratories and organized criminal groups involved in the illicit drugs trade, emphasizing the urgent need to increase efforts by the relevant UN Stakeholders aimed at integrated rural development, building infrastructure and supporting farmers engaged in alternative production;

Recognizing the need for more cooperation and intelligence sharing with a result-oriented approach between the law enforcement agencies of the Member States in and including customs and border authorities in order to better tackle smuggling of narcotics and psychotropic substances within the region and beyond;

Supporting regional and international efforts to improve law enforcement in combating the production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and curtailing drug related financial activities;

Emphasizing the need to assist Afghanistan in developing its economy and diversifying agriculture so as to reduce dependence on revenues from the illicit drugs trafficking, in line with the Lima Declaration and International Guiding Principles on Alternative Development (November 2012);

Stressing the need to share best practices and take adequate measures in preventing, treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts;

Expressing the need for more active and efficient international cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking in Asia;

Attaching great importance to the efforts made by international and regional organizations including the United Nations (UN), office of drugs and crimes (UNODC) and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) to combat the threats of international terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and legalization of income derived from criminal activity;

1. **Call upon** Asian Parliaments to coordinate among themselves to review relevant legislation to address different aspects of combating illicit drug trafficking by harmonizing laws and making minimum punishment stronger;
2. **Call upon** Asian Parliaments to adopt laws on extradition of convicted persons on terrorism and illicit drug trafficking to their countries of origin for fair trial based on national legislations
3. **Stress** the need to exchange information and best practices within APA Member Parliaments on combating illicit drug trafficking;
4. **Reiterate** the need to coordinate and improve law enforcement activities to combat the production and trafficking of narcotic drugs and curtailing the flow of illicit drug more effectively;
5. **Underline** the importance of effectively using international financial assistance for the creation of alternative economic opportunities in order to ensure a sustainable anti-drug policy;
6. **Call upon** APA Asian Parliaments to enable civil society as an effective partner of parliaments and to enhance the role of mass media in combating drug trafficking in Asia;
7. **Encourage** all APA member Parliaments to support their respective governments in order to coordinate with international and regional organizations including the United Nations (UN) to combat the threats of international terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, transnational organized crime and legalization of income derived from criminal activity;
8. **Urge** that a regular dialogue on supporting joint actions of Asian governments against abovementioned threats within APA could become an effective supplement for addressing the challenges of international illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime in the region;
9. **Express** our commitment to encourage and enhance cooperation with all relevant states and international and regional organizations, on matters of common interest in the spirit of this resolution on rendering assistance to combat illicit drug trafficking;
10. **Encourage** networking of the relevant national agencies or organizations in Asia dealing with transnational crimes to further enhance information dissemination and intelligence exchange;
11. **Request** the Secretary General to seek the views of all Member parliaments on ways and means for effective implementation of this resolution.



Draft Resolution on Humanitarian Aid to Syria, Iraq, Yemen, And Myanmar on The Verge of the Humanitarian Catastrophe

SC-Social & Cultural/ Draft Res/2017/24
1 September 2017

We, the Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,

Welcoming the establishment of ceasefire regime in SAR ON 30 December 2016 and the Memorandum on the areas in the SAR, signed in Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, on 4 May 2017;

Recalling UN Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2165;

Being concerned about the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Myanmar and about deprivations inflicted upon the internally displaced persons and refugees or any other affected in those countries;

Acknowledging that the international organizations, including parliamentary ones and NGOs and individual countries shall support delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians trapped in a humanitarian crisis across the globe;

- 1. Call upon** APA member-states to:
- 2. Deliver** humanitarian support to Syrian, Iraqi, Yemeni and Myanmar civilians across conflict lines and border crossings both multilaterally and bilaterally in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 46/182.
- 3. Support** efforts of countries that host refugees and humanitarian aid and recommend to take every effort to facilitate aid delivery in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Myanmar;

4. **Encourage** all relevant parties to further allow UN humanitarian agencies and their partners to utilize routes across conflict lines and border crossings in Syria in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 and UN Security Council resolutions 2139 and 2165;
5. **Provide** assistance to Iraq, Syrian, Yemeni and Myanmar internally displaced persons and refugees, deprived of basic needs and desperate in search of shelter;
6. **Condemn** any attempt in violation of International Humanitarian Law to block humanitarian delivery aid in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Myanmar.

List of Participants
APA Standing Committee Meeting on Social and Cultural Affairs
31 August - 2 September, 2017
Thimphu, Bhutan.

Countries Attending	APA Member Country	Title	Name	Position
1	Afghanistan	Mr.	Kamal Safi	MP (Lower House)-Head of Delegation
		Ms.	Nasima Neyazi	MP (Lower House)
		Mr.	Gul Ahmad Azami	Senator (Upper House)
		Mr.	Omid Hussaini	Director/Ac- accompanying Official
2	Bahrain	Mr.	Abbas Isa Ali Hasan Almadhi	Member of Parliament - Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Fuad Ahmad Jasin Alhajee	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Ali Abbas Ali Mohamed Ali Alaradi	Accompanying Official
		Mr.	Mohamed Ismaeel Abbas Ahmed Alammadi	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Mohamed Ali Mohamed Alkhozai	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Abdulaziz Hasan Ali Abul	Member of Parliament
3	Bangladesh	Mr.	Mir. Mushtaque Ahmed Robi	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Md. Golam Mostofa Biswas	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Khan Md. Elias	Director
4	Bhutan	Mr.	Kuenga	Chairperson
		Mr.	Nima	Chairperson
		Mrs.	Kesang Chuki Dorjee	Dy. Chairperson
		Mr.	Nidup Zangpo	Dy. Chairperson
		Mr.	Jigme Wangchuk	Member of Parliament
		Mrs.	Kezang Wangmo	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Dhan Bahadur Monger	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Zangley Dukpa	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Tashi Dorji	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Yeshey Zimba	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Tek Bahadur Subba	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Karma Dorji	Member of Parliament
5	Cambodia	Mr.	Dr. Nhel Nguon	Second Vice- President of the National Assembly – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Kim Yeat Chhit	Senator, Vice Chairman of the Commission on Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation, Information and Media
		Mr.	Reasey Nguon	Chief of Cabinet of Vice- President of National Assembly
		Mr.	Bunly Hok	Deputy Director of International Relations Department
		Mr.	Thavy Nhem	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Yara Suos	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Dara Srun	Deputy Secretary General
		Mr.	Prakath Pen	Deputy General Director
		Mr.	Vanna Tim	Director of Protocol Department
		Mr.	Chanrainsey Ly	Deputy Director of Information Department

		Mr.	Kosal Lek	Official of International Relations Department
		Mr.	Sophearith Oum	Doctor
		Mr.	Saravy Duong	Adviser to the Vice President of National Assembly
6	Cyprus	Mr.	Nicolaos Tornaritis	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Ms.	Loukia Mouyi	International Relations Officer
7	India	Mr.	Dr. Sunil Baliram Gaikwad	Member of Parliament - Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Manoj Kumar Tiwari	Member of Parliament
		Ms.	Kalpana Sharma	Joint Secretary (Lok Sabha Secretariat)
8	Indonesia	Ms.	Siti Masrifah	Member of Parliament - Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Syofwatillah Muhammad ZainiBahnan	Member of Parliament
		Ms.	Endang Dwi Astvti	Accompanying Official
		Ms.	Avina Nadhila Widarsa	Accompanying Official
9	Iraq	Ms.	Dr. Hanan Saeed Mohsin	Member of Parliament - Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Dr. Louis Karo Bandar	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Abbas Khudhair Abbas Anbori	Officer
10	Islamic Republic of Iran	Ms.	Sayedeh Fatemah Zolghadr	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mrs.	Hajar Chenarani	Member of Parliament
		Ms.	Nayereh Adibi	Advisor
		Mr.	Mohammad Reza Sahraiee	Expert
		Ms.	Pantea Ranjbar	Expert
11	Kuwait	Mr.	Dr. Khalil Abdul- lah A A Abul	Member of Parliament - Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Abdulaziz M A AANasrallah	Translator Specialist
12	Laos	Mr.	Savankhone Rasamoutry	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Alavanh Phanthavong	Accompanying Official
13	Nepal	Mr.	Man Bahadur Vishwakarma	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Punaram Thapa	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Ananta Prasad Koirala	Accompanying Official
14	Pakistan	Mr.	Mir Kabeer Ahmed	Senator – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Hafeezullah Sheikh	Accompanying Official
15	Russia	Mr.	Aleksei Chepa	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Ms.	Yulia Guskova	Accompanying Official
		Ms.	Svetlana Shelest	Translator & Interpreter
16	Syria	Mr.	Omar Mahmoud Hamdo	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mrs.	Nourh Hasan	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Saleh Maarouf	Member of Parliament
17	Thailand	Mr.	Gen. Nipat Thonglek	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Acm Chuchart Boonchai	Member of Parliament
		Mrs.	Suwannee Sirive- jchapun	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Russdy Khantanit	Foreign Affairs Officer
		Ms.	Tatiya Ratanawiroj	Foreign Affairs Officer
18	Turkey	Mr.	Burhan Kayaturk	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Mr.	Baris Karadeniz	Member of Parliament
		Mr.	Murat Hasturk	Accompanying Official
		Ms.	Elif Esra Onal	Accompanying Official
19	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	Ms.	Dr. Nedal Mohammed Ahmed Bin Sherbak Alteneiji	Member of Parliament – Head of Delegation
		Ms.	Hind Ahmed Rashid Alhosan	Accompanying Official

			Alshamsi	
		Ms.	Moza Obaid Hassan Hantoush Al-Ali	Accompanying Official
20	Vietnam	Mr.	Vu Hai Ha	Vice-Chairman of Foreign Affairs Committee – Head of Delegation
		Ms.	Hoang Thi Hoa	Member of Parliament
		Ms.	Tran Kim Chi	Accompanying Official
	APA Secretariat	Mr.	Dr. Mohammad Reza Majidi	Secretary General
		Mr.	Dr. Ali Khorram	Deputy Secretary General
		Mr.	Kia Tabatabaee	Deputy Secretary General
	Two Interpreters	Mr.	Zubair Ahmad Farooqi	Interpreters
		Mr.	Mujeebur Rahman	Interpreters

Draft Address by Tshogpon Jigme Zangpo during the Asian Parliamentary Assembly on 31st August, 2017.

At the outset, on behalf of the parliament and the people of Bhutan and on my own behalf, I would like to extend our warm welcome to 94 distinguished parliamentarians from 20 countries to pristine beauty of Bhutan, a land of Happiness. I also would like express our deepest appreciation to the President and the Secretary General of APA for giving us the wonderful opportunity to host the most awaited conference in Bhutan. This is the first international conference being hosted by the Parliament of Bhutan. We are overwhelmed by the response and participation. We are extremely glad to welcome to an important moment of Bhutan's parliamentary history.

It is a great honour for me and the Parliament of Bhutan to host the Standing Committee Meeting on Social and Cultural Affairs of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly. More than a meeting of the Asian parliamentarians, I see this as a celebration of the greatness of Asian civilization, which expresses in many ways but more so in the depth and reach of its vibrant cultural legacies. As we meet today, it is only proper that we pay tribute to our forefathers who have been both the source and custodians of our rich cultural heritages.

We assemble here today as parliamentarians representing twenty countries. We also assemble today as representatives of our society and culture. We assemble knowing that dialogue, understanding and mutual respect has always been possible, and that within such an enabling environment, we can work together to seek a common future as Asians and as members of humanity. For we rediscover our core belief that irrespective of the quantum leaps in economy and technology, and sophistications of institutions and relationships in a complex world, what continues and will continue to give meaning to our lives and the lives of our children and future generations is our cultural and value systems.

As we deliberate on the set of resolutions related to our society and culture, we will endeavor to arrive at a consensus that their adoption will provide direction, space and the motivation as parliamentarians and as

Asians to work towards a common, better and exciting future. If nothing else, the two-day meetings will certainly strengthen the bonds of friendship as community of Asian parliamentarians with shared concerns and aspirations. But I do know that the rich composition of delegates to this meeting with diverse backgrounds and experiences as well as the enthusiasm of representing your constituents' local, national and global aspirations will enable us to go much beyond.

More than ever, we need to build institutions, create legal instruments and ensure intellectual as well as resource support to not only preserve and promote our cultural heritages but also to ensure that dynamism is inbuilt in cultural norms, practices and value system so that our peoples are well-equipped to manage and control changes that affect their daily lives. I am sure that the Honourable Delegates agree how culture cannot be arrested and fossilized in time and space but must demonstrate resilience not to adapt to changing times but to manage and control the changes that occur over time. Therefore, I am hopeful that this meeting and the resolutions we adopt will hopefully make meaningful contribution towards such a common goal.

The Parliament of Bhutan feels deeply privileged and humbled to have this opportunity of hosting an event that will serve such a purpose. I take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Delegates and member countries for entrusting us with this responsibility which highlights your appreciation of Bhutan as citadel of a unique culture that is worthy of exploration, respect and sharing with the world at large.

We are a small country but the sheer diversity of our languages and culture make some people mistake us for a large country. In order to accommodate that diversity in our nascent parliamentary democracy - His Majesty the Fourth King, who is the founder and architect of our democracy - has envisioned for us a bi-cameral legislature. In this system, the apolitical National Council provides an important political space for representations of ethno-linguistic groups in order to balance popular representations in the National Assembly. And both houses have consciously dedicated a Standing Committee to manage our social and cultural affairs. The members of these committees are representing our Parliament to this meeting.

A few important factors have contributed to the development of this rich culture in our small country. Geography has played a very important role. Ensnared within the Himalayan mountain range, many rivers and mountains have separated communities which developed their own language, culture and belief systems. Another important influence has been the role of Buddhism. Since its introduction in the 5th century, Buddhism has not only shaped the contours of our cultural geography in terms of architecture and paintings expressed in our homes, temples and spiritual monuments but also in the visual and aural landscapes. More than these has been Buddhism's centrality in the development of our values and belief systems. The other reason for the presence and vibrancy of our culture has been the people who have kept alive both the tangible and intangible aspects of our culture.

Most crucial however, has been the leadership of our successive Kings. As a small, land-locked nation surrounded by two of the largest and most populous countries in the world, our Kings saw in our culture the key to our survival as a nation and our well-being. They saw the importance of preservation and promotion of our culture long before the commencement of socio-economic modernization. So it is important for me to highlight the fact that the discourse on preservation and promotion of Bhutanese culture did not take place in the face of challenges posed by modernization.

Today, globalization has certainly provided reasons for added urgency to devote intellectual, material and other resources to keep our culture vibrant. However, Bhutan's modernization which began in the 1960s began with minimal industrialization. You would be surprised, Honourable Delegates, to know that the narrative of Bhutan's socio-economic modernization is not one of industrialization but of investments in agriculture, culture and public goods like roads, schools and hospitals. Our Kings were convinced that our ability to sail into the future as one cohesive and strong national community against many odds is to bank on our cultural heritage. Thus, they pioneered policies and committed scarce resources to ensure that our society and culture mutually support each other. The intellectual font of the policy commitment to preserve and promote our culture finds expression in the concept of Gross National

Happiness (GNH), advocated by our Fourth King and now championed by His Majesty the King.

GNH is a shared aspiration of a future for us that accords primacy to our culture, environment, good governance and economic development. A balanced, holistic and sustainable approach to development is deemed as our self-prescriptions for our collective well-being. It is a constitutional requirement for the government to pursue policies that are GNH-oriented. It is a constitutionally mandated duty for every citizen to be the custodian of our culture.

Today, His Majesty the King is the epitome of GNH. His Majesty and members of our royal family uphold the rich legacies of our culture and tradition, which occupies a central place in our conception of modernity. They are the inspiration for the people from all walks of life to pursue a culturally rich lifestyle and nourish deep sense of pride as Bhutanese.

I must add before concluding that our perspective of culture is neither monolithic nor singular. In fact such a perspective is neither feasible nor healthy both in Bhutan and elsewhere. While Buddhism has played an important role in the development of various aspects of our culture, the sheer diversity of local culture developed and flourished alongside. New faiths particularly Hinduism has also come to Bhutan later, and enjoys a sizeable following. The level of respect and tolerance to new faith like Hinduism is demonstrated by no other than His Majesty the King, who is the protector of all faiths.

As Bhutan marches proudly into the 21st century, our people take inspiration from the selfless, caring and visionary leadership of our King. Both the government and parliament work to put in place, policies and legislations that capture the long-term vision of our King, of which culture occupies an important place.

It is in such socio-cultural and political context of Bhutan that our meeting takes place today. We are looking forward to a cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives that will enrich our resolutions. The Bhutanese delegation as well as our parliamentarians is keen to engage with our guests in sharing experiences, thoughts and perspectives on issues beyond what's on

our agenda. I am optimistic that our deliberations will result in the adoption of the kind of resolutions which will enjoy the confidence of our peoples as both acceptable and respectable legal instruments for the furtherance of our shared aspirations for our societies, cultures and values.

Finally, I once again extend to all the Honorable Delegates our warmest welcome, and wish you a memorable stay in our country. I wish the conference a great success.

Tashi Delek!!!

Speech of APA Secretary General

Honorable Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bhutan, Honorable Speaker of National Assembly of Bhutan, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Social & Cultural Affairs, , Honorable President of the National Council, Honorable President of APA, Distinguished Representative of UNDP, Distinguished Speakers and Parliamentary member of APA, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to this beautiful city of Thimphu, capital of Kingdom of Bhutan on the occasion of Standing Committee meeting on Social and Cultural Affairs.

At the outset, I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation to the people and officials of the Kingdom of Bhutan, specially the distinguished Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan and the chairman of our meeting to have graciously accepted to be our host and offer Bhutanese warm hospitality during our stay in this land of enchantment and happiness and diversity.

I am certain that through his wisdom and professional stewardship over our debates, we will successfully achieve constructive results which will guide us toward our future objectives. On the same note, I am confident that all of you will spare no efforts in contributing as well as supporting the following enrichment of the substances of deliberations whenever possible.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We have come a long way from the time that our main preoccupation was to merely get together and exchange views on few topics of interest to the present position where we spear out our common position on a host of issues dear to our nations in Asia. Issues of major international contents as well as of national concerns.

A glimpse at the variety of resolutions adopted by APA, or the ones which are presently under review and construction, will testify to the fact that steps have been taken in the right direction throughout these past years in all APA meetings.

I am confident that APA track record can and will constitute a solid base and foundation for our future endeavors and achievements. We are well positioned to progress on the fast land especially if we opt to fully exploited Parliamentary Diplomacy in all its dimensions and manifestations.

Finally, I wish to extend to you Mr. Chairman and the National Assembly and National Council of the Kingdom of Bhutan and to all delegations present here, my unreserved cooperation along with that of my staff at the APA Secretariat when it is called upon.

Once again, thank you for coming to Thimphu and attending APA meeting and best wishes for your stay in Bhutan. Thank you very much for your attention.

Honorable speaker of Parliament of Bhutan,

Honorable speakers of Parliament members of APA,

Distinguished members of APA,

Excellencies, colleagues,

It is indeed my honor and privilege to speak to you as Secretary General of APA presenting a brief report on the status of our Standing Committee on Social and Cultural affairs in this beautiful city of...,capital of friendly country of Bhutan.

Before addressing you on the topics at our hand I should take this opportunity to express on behalf of myself and staff of secretariat, my warm appreciation to members of Bhutan parliaments as well as state officials and all others who took the burden of hosting our meeting and providing us with unique hospitality.

Excellencies,

Based on the result of our last Standing Committee meeting, there are 9 resolutions and one new by Russian Federation before you to be considered, discussed, finalized and sent forward for further approval by our Executive Council meeting.

The scope of these resolutions cover the following areas:

_Measures to protect cultural heritage

_Integration through ICT

_Collaboration on Health Equity

_Rights of Migrant workers

_Parliamentarians against corruption

_Women parliamentarians

_Dialogue among world religions

_Combating Smuggling of cultural items

_Combating Drug trafficking

_Humanitarian aids to Syria, Iraq

All these resolutions address main issues and concerns of our Asian societies and thus are considered of utmost important to each and all of us. I propose to you to focus on the contents and ideas being put forward by these resolutions and do your best to enrich them substantially.

On the other hand, one might venture to state that there are other topics and areas of importance through which APA is called for cooperation and thus merits the attention of us all . I take the liberty of naming a few for your kind consideration, hoping that the voice of our organization could be heard across the world. The proposed area of cooperation are:

- "Social Inclusion and Education for people with disabilities":

More than one billion people around the world, of whom nearly 93 million are children, live with some form of disability. Societies' misperception of different forms and types of disability and the limited capacity of social actors to accommodate special needs often place people on the margin. Persons with disabilities experience inequalities in their daily lives, and have fewer opportunities to access a quality education that takes place in an inclusive environment.

As UN supports various international Human Rights Treaties and Conventions that uphold the right to education of all persons,

Through a rights-based approach, APA need to promote inclusive education policies, programmes and practices to ensure equal education opportunities for persons with disabilities. The most important areas of actions could be , The promotion of effective practices and knowledge sharing through various platform, the establishment of institutional partnerships which seeks to guide Member States with regard to the implementation of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Strengthening countries' capacity through the development of guidelines and tools that help build an inclusive learning environment, as well as on teacher training and ICTs in education for persons with disabilities .

_ "Tourism and Cultural tourism":

Tourism attracts and invites numerous visitors across the world to come and visit a country. Tourism is also a wonderful method for cultural exchanges. It also helps in the economic progress of a country and generates new jobs. Therefore, every country should encourage tourism as much as possible because expansion of Tourism encourages societal progress, aids and encourages infrastructure development and is a continual source of income for public and private sectors. Recommends to study the ways and means of expansion of Tourism in Asia and recommend member Parliaments to facilitate tourism in their countries by adopting appropriate legislation.

_ "Synergy with Parliament Libraries":

Convergence of world libraries with APA to empower and promote information synergy among Asian countries,

Noting the achievements in the field of communication in the realm of virtual networking and prevailing opportunities in this boundless sphere, establishing links among APA with member state libraries in the context of MoU can quantitatively and qualitatively promote the scientific, educational and cultural exchanges of information. This atmosphere of cooperation will specifically re-enforce the future research and study potentials. Thus it is recommended that modalities and procedures are considered and adopted to support it.

_"Cooperation among Asian Parliaments on Cultural Heritage":

Cultural heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of a group or society that are inherited from the past generations, maintained in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations. Cooperation among relevant organizations of Asian countries will contribute to the protection of these important inheritance in the entire continent.

Considering the rich cultural heritage of eastern and western civilizations in the Asian continent, common heritage of all Asian countries and inevitability of cooperation among governments and parliaments on safeguarding these heritage and especially referring to the relevant cultural conventions of UNESCO, we recommend proposals on enhancing the effective cooperation among Asian Parliaments in this regard be considered.

"Youth and Violent extremism":

Violent extremism is an affront to the principles of the United Nations, embodied in respect for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is also a rising threat to societies everywhere undergoing deep transformation. Countering violent extremism calls for actions across the board and the long-term that strengthen the foundations for solidarity. At the same time, the Internet provides violent extremists with powerful tools to propagate hatred and violence and to identify and groom potential recruits, creating global online communities that promote radicalization.

Our task must be to empower a new generation of digital citizens at the global level – starting with education, new intercultural skills, and deeper media and information literacy. As the importance of issue for UN and Especially UNESCO's role, to deepen cooperation through education, the sciences, culture and communication, supporting Member States, civil society actors, academia and private sector in order to prevent and reduce youth radicalization online.

"UN's position is clear – the Internet and new ICTs must be platforms for positive engagement, peace, promoting respect for human rights and dignity, enabling dialogue and mutual understanding," said the Director-General. So this could be one of the most important topics related to youth for APA.

_"One Road, One Belt-Silk Road":

65 countries are engaged in the silk road project which is renamed as One Belt-One Road. The project is an example for globalization in the modern world but is mostly focusing on closer collaboration and partnership on connecting Europe-middle east-Asia and Africa. Considering the historical role of Silk Road in the cultural and Economic relation among Asian nations, APA secretariat is requested to initiate preliminary studies to provide practical proposals on encouraging dialogues and cooperation among Asian Parliaments to support this initiative and provide new opportunities and impetus for Asian cooperation.

_"Women and Sport":

Emphasizing the need to make the most of public potentials and the need to empower women, Teaching life style attitudes toward having a healthy life and society considering the cultural and socioeconomic status of women, Teaching ergonomics for having an efficient and more healthy women society, Providing the knowledge of home-based exercises and coping strategies for reducing and management of musculoskeletal disorders and Health promotion trainings with the emphasis on physiological factors for women with different socioeconomic and cultural status is the most important thing for improving women self-care and mental care which would have the basic and crucial role in promotion of social health.

The APA secretariat is willing and ready to launch its activities in this regard and provide you with expertise reports as food for thoughts.

I would like to once again register my warm appreciation to Parliament and Government of Bhutan for their kind hospitality and wish you success in your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.



Key Remarks

HON. DR. NGUON NHEL

Second Vice-President of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia and
High Representative of Samdech Akka Moha Ponhea Chakrei Heng Samrin, President of
the Cambodian National Assembly and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly,
Meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs

Thimphu, Kingdom of Bhutan

31 August, 2017

- Honorable Speaker Jigme Zangpo
- Honorable Heads and Members of APA Member Parliaments
- Your Excellency Dr. Mohammad Reza Majidi, Secretary General of APA
- Distinguished Delegates and Friends

1. Today, it is my great pleasure and privilege to attend the inaugural ceremony for this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in this beautiful city of Thimphu in the Kingdom of Bhutan. On this wonderful occasion, on behalf of **Samdech Chakrei Heng Samrin**, President of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia and President of APA, I wish to express my deep and heartfelt thanks to the Government, People and Parliament of Bhutan for their excellent arrangements for this meeting and the great hospitality extended to the Cambodian delegation since we arrived.
2. The meeting of the Social and Cultural Standing Committee is very important and relevant to the regional and global context for following reasons:

- First, this meeting of the APA Standing Committee contributes to achieving the common aspirations enshrined in the APA vision – a region where our beloved people can live in peace, stability and prosperity.
 - Second, this meeting is in line with the global agenda for all countries to make utmost efforts to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Most of the goals recognize socio-cultural issues – including quality of education, peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality and food security. In short, we can say that no development can be sustainable without including culture because culture is who we are and what shapes our identity.
 - Third, this meeting is also important as it provides a platform for Honorable Members of Parliament from the region – representing more than 60 percent of the world population – to discuss and exchange ideas, perspectives and experiences to seek possible solutions and strategic approaches to address the regional and international challenges we face by drafting resolutions in line with our common vision for APA.
3. In this regard, I encourage all distinguished parliamentarians to actively participate, discuss and exchange ideas, perspectives and experiences as a foundation for effective and efficient responses to these challenges, particularly those concerning social and cultural affairs, and creating new development opportunities for our countries.
4. Socio-cultural issues are an important dimension to promote economic growth and sustainable development as trust, mutual understanding and common determination are key foundations to achieve peace, stability and progress sustained across societies, regions and the world.
5. For this reason, in the last few decades Cambodia has made its best efforts in maintaining, preserving and promoting culture at national, regional and

international levels. Cambodia has played an active role in promoting the value of Asian culture and last July Cambodia became Chairman of Asian Cultural Council of the International Conference on Asian Political Parties (ICAPP). Up to now, a number of Cambodian tangible and intangible cultural heritage have been listed in the World Heritage List by the World Heritage Committee, including Angkor Wat, Prah Vihea Temple, Royal Ballet Dance, Sbek Thom and Cha Pey etc. Recently, Cambodia just gained another national pride as another ancient temple called Sambor Prei Kuk Temple- the area had identified as the capital of a civilization that flourished in late 6th and 7th centuries has been given world heritage status.

Honorable Speaker

Honorable Delegates of APA Member Parliaments

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

6. In recent decades, our region has experienced dramatic economic, political and social change. Economic growth has helped lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and more than 50 percent of Asia's population is now classified as middle class. This not only drives our region as an engine of growth but also as the leading region in an emerging global economy and a key element in ensuring political stability and progress in the region.
7. As we enjoy our achievements and organize this meeting, however, several countries in the region still face numerous social, economic, cultural and political challenges. These include terrorism, food and energy shortages, transnational crime, aviation insecurity, human trafficking, smuggling of cultural items and climate change as well as changes in political geography. Such challenges are becoming more difficult and complicated to address, especially terrorism, which is spreading and seriously threatening regional and global security. We all, therefore, need to exert greater joint efforts and

stronger determination to work together – bilaterally and multilaterally – for both the regional and global legislative framework.

8. In this regard, your active participation and contributions to the discussions on the draft resolutions of the Social and Cultural Standing Committee are important to make all resolutions practical, effective and relevant to our countries and the region. I wish to advise that all of these drafts will be submitted to the First Executive Council Meeting to be hosted by the Cambodian Parliament for further consideration before being submitted for adoption by the 10th APA Plenary in Turkey.

On behalf of **Samdech Chakrei Heng Samrin**, President of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Cambodia, I wish to invite once again all APA member parliaments to attend the First Executive Council meeting, which will be held on 1 to 4 October, in Phnom Penh.

9. Before concluding, I wish to reiterate that this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs will offer valuable contributions to accomplish the common aspirations of Asian people to live in peace, stability and prosperity, creating a region where all countries and people can live together in harmony, prosperity and happiness.

10. Last but not least, I wish to express my sincere thanks to the organizing committee, particularly the Parliament of Bhutan, for its excellent arrangements for this meeting and warmest hospitality to all delegates. I wish the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs a great success.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Keynote address by Prime Minister *Dasho* Tshering Tobgay at the inaugural of Asian Parliamentary Assembly's Standing Committee Meeting on 31 August 2017

Hon'ble Speaker of Bhutan,
Hon'ble Chairperson of the National Council,
Hon'ble Leaders of delegations,
Hon'ble Parliamentarians,
President and Secretary General of Asian Parliamentary Assembly, Distinguished guests and participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to take this privilege to convey the warm greetings and good wishes of His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan. My country and I are truly honoured to host this important meeting in Bhutan.

The gathering in Bhutan, where the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs will discuss measures on protecting cultural diversity and cultural heritage in Asia, is most auspicious and appropriate.

I say this because in Bhutan, we take pride in our cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, that has been the basis of our identity as a sovereign nation. Therefore, it may not be a mere coincidence that our very capable Hon'ble speaker is serving as the Vice President of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs.

I am happy to learn that the Parliament of Bhutan continues to actively participate in the Asian Parliamentary Assembly's general assembly and in other standing committees. Bhutan is a country rich in culture and social values and thus Bhutan's contribution will be significant through hosting of the meeting.

Distinguished parliamentarians

This is the biggest gathering of parliamentarians in my country, and I would like to take this opportunity to share our journey to a parliamentary democracy.

For centuries, my country has followed a policy of self-imposed isolation. We built our first motorable road only in the 1960s; we started our first five-year development plans only in 1961 and we introduced internet in the Kingdom only in 1999.

However, guided by the Buddhist wisdom that has evolved through the millennia, Bhutan had always taken the rule of law seriously, even before we shed the policy of self-imposed isolation and long before we introduced parliamentary democracy.

Bhutan's modern parliamentary process started in 1954 when His Majesty the Third King established the National Assembly to develop political consciousness among the people, and to ensure better administration of the country. The Assembly was not a mere ceremonial body. His Majesty the King empowered the Assembly, to remove, even the king by a majority or three-fourth majority vote against him.

This selflessness arises from the virtues that are engrained in our culture and derived from Buddhism. In Bhutan, we call them the enlightened monarchs - Dharma Kings.

The independence of the three arms of government, crucial for a functioning democracy was realised long before we opened up. In 1969, on a royal command, the judiciary was separated from the executive to ensure better administration of justice.

Ladies and gentlemen

Bhutan survived and thrived largely because of the political vision of our leaders. In our history, political leadership dates back to the 17th century. The great Zhabdrung who fought off invaders and unified the kingdom was both a monk and a king. By the end of his reign, he bifurcated the system of governance with separate leaders for the clergy and the secular community.

Since then, we have evolved from a theocracy to an absolute monarchy to a unique Democratic Constitutional Monarchy.

This journey has been peaceful, seamless and unique. This is because the transition didn't happen overnight. The transition was nurtured by successive monarchs. The process of decentralisation matured into the democratisation process culminating in a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy. International observers have said that Bhutan has been blessed by successive Kings who seem to carry the gene of a democratic nature.

Distinguished members of parliament

Our constitution is unique in many ways. It not only empowers the citizen, but also keeps religion and religious community out of politics. It is a gift from His Majesty the King, who enjoys the absolute confidence of his people.

The Constitution of Bhutan was not drafted or given under coercion or compulsion. The people of Bhutan did not want the Constitution imposed democracy, but His Majesty, in his wisdom, insisted that it was necessary to have one for the benefit of our posterity.

No other Constitution in the world has a provision where the King has to abdicate and hand over the Throne at the age of 65. No other constitution in the world has provisions to protect its environment and fix a minimum limit of forest coverage.

The Constitution requires the state to promote conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness, a vision for development gifted to the world by His Majesty the Great Fourth.

In the context of culture, which Hon'ble parliamentarians would be discussing today, our Constitution has a separate Article on Culture. In the GNH narrative, it is recognized that a decline in traditional heritage and cultural wisdom will lead to a weakened society. Even as we discuss this, if you look around, many countries are regretting the loss of their culture because of changing times and priorities.

Our Parliament has Social and Cultural committees mandated to review and recommend measures for promotion and preservation of all forms of culture. One of their functions is to interact with relevant national, regional and international organizations and stakeholders.

Today, I am happy to see Hon'ble members from 20 countries engaged in discourse on this important issue.

As each member country has their own unique and successful narrative of Parliamentary development. I hope the Assembly will provide an excellent forum for sharing great ideas and experiences, from which we can learn, become wiser and foster bonds between our parliamentarians and countries.

Ladies and gentlemen

There are grand objectives made when regional or international bodies meet, but too often much is forgotten after the event. In our Region for instance, we talk of the vast resources, of cultural and historical ties, of similarities among the nations. We talk about commonalities, but our differences dominate. Quite often, our regional efforts are overshadowed by bilateral differences.

With the blessing of our protective deities, I pray that Bhutan hosting the important meeting will culminate in realistic commitments in preserving, promoting and protecting our rich cultural heritage and cultural diversity.

I also hope that Bhutan hosting the Social and Cultural Committee meeting will:

- Enhance Bhutan's parliamentary relations with other countries;
- Promote parliamentary diplomacy and tourism;
- Contribute towards promotion of social and cultural values among Asian countries; and
- Showcase Bhutan's successful journey in preservation and promotion of our culture; and

With this in mind, I would like to sincerely thank all the delegations and participants of this conference for their earnest participation to the success of this event.

I am hopeful that this meeting will contribute in bringing regional cooperation, peace and harmony, and the right to development as well as social, cultural, and environmental rights of the peoples in Asia.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.

Opening remarks

On the

**Opening of the meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and
Cultural Affairs of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly.**

31st August – 2nd September, 2017, Bhutan.

Gerald Daly , Resident Coordinator, UN Bhutan,

Thimphu, Bhutan

Kuzumbola,

Salam Ali Cum,

Your Excellency the Honorable Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dasho Tshering Tobgay

Honorable Speaker of National Assembly Jigme Zangpo

Honorable Speaker of the National Council,

Honorable Dr. Mohammad Reza MAJIDI, Secretary General, Asian Parliamentary Assembly

Honorable President of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly

Honorable Members of Parliament from APA countries

Distinguished Lyonpos, Ambassadors and Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am fortunate to be part of this important meeting of the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly. **In a World awash with data and information – we rely on parliaments – to emphasize a dialogue of knowledge and insights that bring us to the space of wisdom.**

To paraphrase the Honorable Speaker of Bhutan, a Parliament is the “embodiment” of a nation’s democratic future. So too, you, are the embodiment of Asia’s democratic future.

You are no doubt aware that you have arrived on the cusp of a most significant moment in the country’s history. Next year, Bhutan will celebrate its first decade of democracy – a remarkable achievement.

Since the 1970s, Bhutan has been inspired by the vision of Gross National Happiness (GNH) as a measure by which to judge national progress, a vision that has translated into concrete governance agendas and policy planning tools, and has given rise to a set of robust metrics designed to measure Bhutan’s development progress.

Bhutan’s experience inspired policy makers and policy frameworks around the world, including Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), signed in September 2015 by 193 world leaders, **including the nations you represent from Asia.**

Just like GNH, the SDGs conceptualize “sustainable development” in terms much broader than a limited focus on GDP. Both frameworks recognized the role of inclusive, democratic governance, with responsive institutions, and access to justice for all as paramount. Both frameworks focus on the importance of reducing vulnerabilities. This is a key objective in Bhutan’s planning and implementation frameworks and I am confident it is in your respective nations agendas, **so as to ensure no-one is left behind. Speaking personally, I believe the measure of a great country is how it looks after its most vulnerable.**

Yet, while recognizing the ambition, scope and opportunity that the SDGs represent, one of the critiques of the SDGs by nations including Bhutan is that the framework of goals is not sufficiently strong on culture -- something that features most strongly in GNH.

It is most fitting, therefore, that in welcoming its first Asian Parliamentary Assembly gathering, Bhutan should host the Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs. I look forward to learning the results of your deliberations on measures to promote cultural diversity and protect cultural heritage in Asia. **Your discussions here will add value to how the SDGs are grounded and strengthened not only here in Asia but equally importantly in the wider world.**

For each of the areas you will discuss over the coming days – be it health equity, information and communication technologies, the protection and promotion of migrant workers' rights, gender equality or illicit trafficking – I would encourage you to study the Global Goals, their targets and their indicators, such that your engagement feeds directly into progress towards achieving those Global Goals.

In this context I would like to commend and congratulate the National Assembly Secretariat of Bhutan for taking up the role of hosting the Committee's deliberations, which the UN in Bhutan is privileged to support.

The role of parliaments in achieving the SDGs

The Hanoi Declaration during the International Parliamentary Union Assembly in 2015 pledged that parliamentarians must hold governments accountable for the Global Goals, and to make sure that enabling laws are passed and budgets adopted.

I would like to touch on three key points on the role of Parliaments as powerful agents of change for the SDGs:

1. **First, the legislative role:** Ensuring a pro-poor, gender sensitive, human rights-based enabling environment for SDGs implementation is a critical step. Parliaments have the power to make legislations and approve international agreements. Parliaments should use this ability to facilitate the implementation of the SDGs, reviewing existing legislation, proposing amendments, or where necessary drafting new legislation as required to meet the Goals. Some of the Goals articulate specific requirements related to legislation such as Goal 16 on Governance.
2. **Second: Oversight functions:** parliamentary oversight mechanisms can be very effective in focusing attention on progress and/or obstacles to progress. Here in Bhutan, the Parliament in their last session passed a motion that the National Assembly would oversee the implementation of the SDGs, and every Parliament Session would have one day allotted for deliberations on the SDGs. **I commend Bhutan's legislators for this foresighted action which shifts the focus to the needs of future generations.**
3. **Third, the representational role:** MPs can both generate political will and leverage space for a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society, women and youth, and vulnerable and marginalized groups to be engaged in the decisions that affect their lives.

I wish to highlight some examples from the above functions from the nations represented here today.

In **Bangladesh** as a result of a sustained, strategic advocacy and lobbying campaign by parliamentarians, who had formed a cross-party Climate Parliament Group in 2012, the Bangladesh Government announced budgetary provisions for the advancement of renewable energy in June 2014, including the establishment of a US \$50 million Renewable Energy Fund. In so doing, the Government put in place the building blocks to achieve SDG 7 on renewable energy.

In **India**, the Committee on the Empowerment of Women was established with the authority to examine the Government's record in working towards women's equality and women's representation in legislative bodies and other fields. They have taken up enquires in line with SDG 5 on gender equality the areas of women's health care, women in detention, protecting women from domestic violence, and sexual harassment of women in the workplace.

In Pakistan, following the adoption of the SDGs, the National Assembly established a cross-party group from all major political parties, with the dual objectives of providing information on SDGs and the role of parliamentarians in their implementation, and creating a venue to coordinate SDG implementation.

Finally here in **Bhutan**, the Parliament, with support from the UNDP, has put in place a system of 'Virtual Zomdu' – fiber-optic based videoconferencing facilities connecting 92 Community Centres (CC) and 45 constituencies across Bhutan with their member of Parliament here in Thimphu.

Through this technology, Parliamentarians can connect face-to-face with their constituencies to understand and better represent their needs, even if there are mountains standing in the way. Given the geography of this country this is an important and connecting innovation which actively links people and parliament.

We the UN have also supported parliament and their support staff on capacity development – including advocacy on child rights. In this regard the Parliamentarians for Children meetings – with support from UNICEF, links younger citizens to the parliaments that are serving them: **their young voices are not to be left behind.**

Distinguished Participants,

I am mindful of his Majesty's recent advice at the 12th Convocation of the Royal University of Bhutan where he spoke of the 5 extraordinary qualities that define the Bhutanese, these being Sincerity, Mindfulness, Astuteness, Resilience, and being Timeless.

In this regard, I am also reminded of the words of that great Indian Statesman, Philosopher, and former President of India, S. Radhakrishnan who opined on the importance of relating 'the present to the past and the future, to live in time as well as eternity'.

These also are the qualities that motivate and underpin the work of the UN here in Bhutan and I find these qualities to be particularly relevant to this Standing Committee of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly. Today we live in particularly fast-moving rivers, especially of information. Because of the speed of change and information exchange (sometimes of a distorted nature) we are invited into the highest levels of mindfulness, astuteness and awareness of the needs of the generations that follow after us.

On behalf of the United Nations, I wish you successful deliberations, as you Build the Future learning from the Past and the Present.

Thank you and Tashi Delek.