**PARLIAMENT OF BHUTAN**

**INFORMATION CIRCULAR**

**(Meeting of APA Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs,**

**Thimphu, Bhutan from August 31–September 2, 2017)**

The Parliament of Bhutan will host the Meeting of APA Standing Committee on Social and Cultural Affairs from August 31 - September 2, 2017 at the Convention Center, Thimphu, Bhutan. All participants attending the event are kindly requested to familiarize themselves with the Information Circular before registering for the Meeting.

The APA Permanent Secretariat, Tehran is responsible for the organization and conduct of the meeting while the Parliament of Bhutan will provide the conference facilities, accommodation, local hospitality and local transportation.

**Program**: A copy of the draft outline of the programme is available on the APA website ([www.asianparliament.org](http://www.asianparliament.org/) and <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/content/apa-social-cultural-committee-2017>

**Venue and meetings**: The Standing Committee Meeting will take place at the Convention Centre in Thimphu, which is about 5-10 minutes drive from the hotel.

**Registration and Information Desk**: A Registration Desk will be established at the Hotels and also an Information Desk at the Convention Centre that will function as help desk to facilitate distinguished participants. Delegates are requested to collect Conference Pass and other materials from the Registration Desk.

**Conference Pass:** All Delegates are requested to send a photo each electronically to the Parliament of Bhutan along with their registration forms which will be used for their conference passes to the given email in this Circular. Delegates should ensure that the photograph reflects their current appearance to prevent access difficulties. Photographs should be passport-style (jpeg), with a clear image of the applicant’s face taken against a plain background.

**Registration:** Invitation letters have already been sent to Member Parliaments. Registration form has been uploaded on the website of Parliament of Bhutan. Delegates are requested to complete registration process by visiting [<http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/content/apa-social-cultural-committee-2017>](http://www.nab.gov.bt/)

**Hospitality:** Number of official delegates of APA member Parliaments is determined by Article 8 of APA Charter. Parliament of Bhutan will offer local hospitality (accommodation, meals and local transportation) up to two delegates of all APA member parliaments plus one official from August 30- September 3, 2017.

**Travel Arrangements:**

* Please note that travel should be routed through Paro International Airport, Bhutan. Only *Bhutan Airlines* and *Druk Air* fly into Bhutan and convenient connections are available from Bangkok, Dhaka, Kolkata, Delhi, Kathmandu and Singapore. Since August and September months are tourist seasons in Bhutan, delegates are requested to make the flight bookings at the earliest.
* All delegates will be disembarked at Paro International Airport, Paro, Bhutan and from there drive to Thimphu which will take about one hour.
* A Reception Desk will be established at the Paro International Airport, Paro during the official arrival and departure dates round the clock to assist the delegates. The reception desk will display the Conference Logo with the title “*APA Standing Committee, Bhutan*” and assistance will be provided to clear arrival formalities.
* Transport will be provided to the hotel.
* Duly filled Travel & Accommodation forms should reach the Parliament of Bhutan on or before **June 30, 2017**.

**Visas:** Appropriate visas will be required for the delegates to enter Bhutan. Delegates should submit visa applications at least three weeks before travel. It is necessary to have passports valid for six months or more from the date of departure for travel to Bhutan. All passports must have at least two empty pages.

The following member states have visa exemption for travel to Bhutan:

-          Bangladesh

-          India

-          Maldives

-          Thailand

All Delegates and accompanying officials are requested to provide diplomatic/official passports to fill up the visa application form along with passport copies and send to us in email provided in the circular for obtaining visa. The visa form can be downloaded at <http://www.mohca.gov.bt/forms/31visa.pdf>

* Visas will only be arranged for delegates of Member Parliaments that do not have Bhutan Embassy in their respective countries. The necessary information will have to be provided to the Parliament Secretariats not later than **August 15, 2017** and following information will be required:-
* Visa application form (attached)
* Scanned copy of passport
* Latest picture (passport size)
* Flight itinerary.

**Custom & Immigration Clearance:** The Parliament of Bhutan will arrange a priority lane for Custom & Immigration clearance for delegates at the time of arrival and departure. Duties are to be paid for dutiable items by the delegates concerned (if and where required).

**Ground Transportation:** Transport will be provided for all official functions during the period of the meeting. All delegates will be served on equal basis in their capacity as delegates. Separate vehicles shall be provided to Presiding Officers/Deputy Presiding Officers.

Transport service will be in operation at the times mentioned in the program and it will not be possible to provide additional transport facilities for delegates apart from official engagements. Individual cars and drivers will not be provided. however, those delegates desirous of utilizing transport for personal purposes can always rent a car from the Hotel.

**Accommodation:**

* Accommodation will be provided to the delegates at Taj Tashi and Le Meridian Hotels, Thimphu.
* Delegates who wish to upgrade their rooms to suites will have to pay for additional cost. The Parliament of Bhutan will facilitate in securing reservation, however, advance information with credit card details will be required for any changes latest by **July 31, 2017.**
* The Parliament of Bhutan will pay for single occupancy on bed and breakfast basis, at Taj Tashi and Le Meridien for the duration of the conference. Deluxe suites/Junior suites will be reserved for Speakers/Presiding Officers only.
* The Parliament of Bhutan will not pay for extras, such as additional nights’ accommodation, meals not offered as a part of official programme, alcoholic drinks, laundry, mini-bar and international calls. Delegates and participants are required to pay for these facilities at the time of availing the service or at the time of checkout.
* On arrival at the hotels, delegates should visit Information Desk set-up at the hotel to collect their room keys. Room keys will only be issued to the delegates after the registration process is complete.
* **Those delegates who will be self-financing should pay the hotel in advance through bank transfers (provided in the hotel form).**
* **Delegates are advised to carry some cash (dollars, euros, pounds) for payment of miscellaneous expenses as banks, hotels and shops do have credit cards facilities or due to slow network, there might be problem withdrawing cash at the ATMs.**

**Early check-in and late check out:** The Parliament of Bhutan shall assist delegates who may wish to stay for additional nights either before or after the conference at the delegates’ expenses. Those who require such assistance should inform the Parliament Secretariats latest by **July 31, 2017** to make necessary arrangements in this regard.

**Security:** Delegates must wear their conference passes to access the meeting venue, social functions or to take official transport. For security reasons, access will be tightly controlled and those without a pass will not be permitted entry.

**Group Photograph:** On the day of the official opening of the meeting, a group photograph of all the delegates will be taken and a copy of which will be provided to each delegate. The venue and time of the group photograph will be conveyed to all the delegates upon arrival in Thimphu.

**Interpretation:** English is one of the official languages in Bhutan. The Parliament Secretariat will arrange equipment facilities for simultaneous interpretation but the delegations are requested to bring in their own interpreters at their own expenses.

**Delegates’ Business Centre:** A well equipped business centre will be established at the conference venue for delegates, having facilities like computer, internet, photocopier and fax etc.

**Media Centre:** A Media Centre will be established at the meeting venue. It will be open to correspondents of national press, radio and television.

**Weather:** The average temperature during August/September in Bhutan will range between 21°C to 8°C.

**Dress:** Business or national dress (warm clothes) is appropriate for the event. Light warm jackets are recommended in the evening and morning.

**Currency:** Major international currencies can be exchanged at the airport, hotels and nearby banks. Few banks accept international credit card facilities but it is advised that all delegates carry some cash (dollars, euros, pounds) for payment of miscellaneous expenses. The following banks accept international credit card facilities:

1.      Bank of Bhutan Ltd.: International visa card,

2.      Druk Punjab Bank Ltd.: Maestro card and Mastercard

3.      Tashi Bank Ltd.: Master card (only for Nepal).

**\*\*\*Sometimes due to network, the card may not work.**

**Medical Facilities:** Bhutan is the only carbon negative country in the world and sickness related to pollutions of any kind are almost impossible. However to meet any health emergencies, first aid medical facilities will be available throughout the period of the conference at the respective hotel and at the conference venue. Delegates requiring urgent medical attention should inform the Information Desk. The cost of treatment of conditions other than which are routine and minor, is the responsibility of the delegate. A doctor will be on duty at the Hotel and Meeting Hall throughout the duration of the meetings.

**Insurance:** Insurance for personal accident, medical emergencies, loss of luggage and currency and against any damage will be the responsibility of individual delegate.

**Liaison with local Embassies:** All APA Members with diplomatic representation in Bhutan will be notified regarding details of the conference.

We look forward to welcoming all the delegates to Bhutan and wish them an enjoyable stay during the meeting.

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| **Contact Information:**  **Parliament of Bhutan**  **Email :**  bhutanparliament@gmail.com  Phone No. :  +975 2 322729/+975 2 322793  Fax No. : +975 2 324210  Web: <http://www.nab.gov.bt/en/content/apa-social-cultural-committee-2017>  **Copy to APA Secretariat:**  **Email :secretariat@asianparliament.org**  Fax   : +98-21- 26118809  Phone  :+98-21-26118827&26118829  Web: www.asianparliament.org |  |