

**རྒྱལ་འཛིན་ཞིབ་འཚོལ་དང་བློ་གྲོས་ཚོགས་སྡེ།**

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**Talk delivered as the Guest of Honour**

**at**

**The Closing Ceremony for the Conference**

**on**

**Inclusive Education**

by

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 **MEMBER**

(3.30 pm 15th of November, 2017)

College of Education,

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**Director Generals of the Ministry of Education,**

**President of Paro College of Education,**

**Directors and Representatives from different agencies;**

**Representative of UNICEF,**

**Education Specialists,**

**Representatives of International Agencies,**

**Representatives from Disabled People’s Organization (DPOs),**

**Executives of NGOs,**

**Chief Dzongkhag & Thromde Education officers,**

**The principals of the school affiliated with special education programmes,**

**The parents and relatives of persons with disabilities, and**

**Ladies and gentlemen:**

I am grateful to the Ministry of Education for the kind invitation for me to be here at the Closing Ceremony of the Conference on Inclusive Education on the theme: “The Success of Inclusive Education is in Leadership”.

I am happy to note that the Conference is very timely, as the government and as a nation; we are obligated to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goal of ‘No Child Left Behind’ by 2030.

It is very important that, all our policies and programmes including the schools and learning institutes across the country, are inclusive. As the whole is only complete when all its parts are included, our policies and systems can take credit to be just and full ones, only when those that need these most and those that are generally unreached are cared for and reached.

As a society we ought to be proactive in managing diverse learners in full cognizant of the fact that there exist several challenges of cultural, economic and social being faced by differently-abled. They need to be ensured equality and inclusiveness as their lawful rights.

No society can afford to rest and be in peace, if some of its members are deprived of rights in their life, to share the benefits of our socio-economic development plans and justice from the system and leadership of good governance.

As a Democracy, it is very important that we in Bhutan view our development process through inclusive lens. Specially as a nation with a small population, we have to capitalize the potentials and positivity aspects of diversity. We all need to see the ‘persons’ not ‘the disability’.

When we use the term ‘inclusion’ it ought to be understood to mean that it is about the community being ‘whole’, that values the sense of ‘togetherness’ and ‘oneness’ irrespective of gender, socio-economic status, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, age etc..

In other words, everyone has to be accepted as partners and active participants: enjoying equitable claim and access to the public services, without any discrimination: be it civil, political, economic, social or cultural.

In this regard, it is incumbent upon us that we build and/or provide access to the built environment, transportation, information, communications and infrastructure, so that even a person living with disability is able to live an independent life. He/she is able to participate in all aspects of public and social life. He/she is able to enjoy the full range of human rights making differences in their lives and that of the other people.

In this regard, it is important that our leaders in government, Dzongkhags, Thromdes, schools, civil societies and communities realize the importance and urgency of ‘inclusiveness’ in order to ‘empower children and persons’ with disabilities’ in our respective jurisdictions. There is no denying the truth that quality of leadership being demonstrated by our leaders, teachers and trainers will make the world of difference. Leaders who feel, care and dare to dream, and carry out the impossible task to make that bit of difference. That extra mile. Sometimes, we all need to imagine ourselves to be in the shoes of those living with disabilities.

Today, I would like to herald the commitment of the Royal Government to achieve 100% enrolment through inclusive education. Since the leadership in the government has taken the call, I trust it will deliver every child born or living with disability to be educated, each according to his or her situation.

I am happy that with this initiative, all children living with disabilities in Bhutan will not only be able to realise their rights but also have their lives lit up as full human beings.

I congratulate all our education officials and principals who commit to lead in advancement of the integration, acceptance, and success of students living with diverse abilities. Though I have no doubt that the adoption of inclusion might bring in added challenges initially to you all. But then, at the end, there will be the joy of having empowered and instilled skill of independence in the lives of children with diverse abilities otherwise “left behind”.

Bhutan, though a latecomer to formal and institutionalized education and the universal education coverage is yet to be met even for the normal children. However, a beginning for the inclusion of children with Special Educational Needs was made with the opening of the school for the visually impaired in the early seventies.

The Changangkha Middle Secondary School, Thimphu and the Deaf Education programmes at Drukgyel, Paro along with 14 schools and CSOs already cater to children living with learning difficulties and disabilities, improving their and their families’ lives.

I may share with all here that, while many children and individuals with ‘mild to moderate disabilities’ would get general education, there are those with ‘moderate to severe diverse abilities’, most of them who need special support. There are those that need to be helped even basic human needs such as going to toilet, brushing teeth, reaching food in the mouth etc..

But can we ignore them? Can we merely lock them in the forgotten corners? They need to be educated too. It is a big challenge.

Therefore, there is a lot that the country is required to carry out in order to cover all children and individuals living with diverse abilities. All these call for more concerted efforts including raising awareness and educating the society on the subject and knowledge of diverse abilities and change mindsets and attitude towards persons living with disabilities.

These need to get added momentum.

Last but not the least, amongst the three Disabled People Organizations (DPOs): the Ability Bhutan Society, the Draktsho Vocational Centre and the Disabled Persons’ Association of Bhutan; we hope the DPAB and Draktsho would play the lead role in supplementing and complementing the efforts of the Royal Government in the education and training of all persons living diverse abilities, while ABS shall commit to continue its focus on providing special interventions for individuals living with moderate to severe diverse abilities, who require home-based, individualized and invisible care and support.

As I close, I congratulate the successful adoption of the Conference Resolutions and the conclusion of the Conference. I am sure that each resolution will transform in activities that would further value add towards enhancement of the quality of lives of every differently-abled person.

**Thank you & Trashi Deleg.**