

Madam president, Ministers and Distinguished delegates

1. Greetings from the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. I have the honour to convey best wishes of my King, our Queen and the people of Bhutan.
2. As a medical professional, I am always overjoyed to be interacting with health fraternity, within the country and beyond.
3. We are living in extraordinary times as we all deal with the crushing weight of the pandemic. But as much as there are challenges, we are inspired by the incredible stories of kindness and bravery of our healthcare workers across the globe. I would also like to offer deepest condolences to everyone who have lost their loved ones to this pandemic.
4. For Bhutan, we always believed that a nation can only grow on strong foundations of good healthcare system. As the pandemic came closer to us, our preparations revolved around the comprehensive healthcare system Bhutan always had. For decades, alongside education, our Kings have always ensured free, quality healthcare for all.
5. And in times like this, we are once again asked to reflect on the efforts and importance we have placed on public healthcare system, mainly the universal health coverage for all. Such pandemics are a bitter reminder that healthcare system of a nation determines the health of the entire globe.
6. Which is why it is time for leaders to come together and discuss global health problem as a common objective. This is where we see WHO taking a strong lead in redefining our approach to global healthcare system.
7. We are grateful for the timely support from South East Asia Regional Health Emergency Fund. I am particularly happy with the efficient leadership of Dr Poonam, Regional Director of WHO-SEARO and the WHO country office, Bhutan.

8. We are very fortunate to have our Kings who have always emphasized on the importance of free and quality healthcare for all and now, His Majesty is personally spearheading the combat against the disease.
9. All the 21 cases are picked from government sponsored quarantine facilities. We ensure strict surveillance and tests during the 21-day mandatory quarantine. But again, we are not compromising on our preparations should we experience local transmission.
10. I understand it will be a while before we come out of the COVID-19 burden. Here, I would like to urge the participants to discuss measures to ensure that more vulnerable countries continue to have access to diagnostic tools, PPEs, drugs and of course the vaccine, when it actually becomes available.
11. As we put all our resources and energy behind COVID-19, let us also remind ourselves not to compromise on routine health services. We may not realise now but what if the damage on other health services like NCDs, infectious diseases and vaccination become unmanageable when COVID-19 recedes. This is equally worrying.
12. That is why my government is always reminded of routine health as we combat the pandemic. Like all governments are put to test by this pandemic, Bhutan, though resource constraint, will also do our part.
13. As I end, I would like to share my King's concern. This health crises have already put immense burden on economy and if not mindful and strategic, it could lead to social disruption. In anticipation of such challenges, let us all work together to avert these crises, just as fighting covid-19 requires us to work as one. I look forward to your cooperation.
14. I send prayers from my King and people of Bhutan. Thank you.