Madam President, Madam Director General, Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the Bhutanese delegation, I would like to congratulate you, Dr Kathlina Bogay on your election to the high office of the President of the Executive Board. It is an affirmation of your capability and vision that will no doubt steer our august body to ever greater heights of success. We would also like to express our deep commendations to the outgoing President, Dr Davidson L Hepburn, for the outstanding manner in which he guided the multifarious functions arising out of the 35th session of the General Conference in his own quintessential Davidson way.

It is not always that the dream of a nation so seamlessly coalesces with the vision of an international organization. But here is a rarity. UNESCO’s vision of a world of peace and Bhutan’s goal of Gross National Happiness are natural allies dedicated to building a better world for all of us and for future generations to live in. UNESCO’s thrust areas of education, science, and culture, as indeed its focus on sustainable development find a natural home in the four pillars that support the architecture of Gross National Happiness – balanced and equitable socio-economic development, conservation of our natural environment, preservation of our cultural heritage, and promotion of good governance.
We believe that if a nation has a big dream, its education system must affirm and advance it. To this end, Bhutan’s Ministry of Education launched a nationwide reform initiative called *Educating for Gross National Happiness* to be realized by building green schools for green Bhutan. The elements of a green school encompass the multiple dimensions of the learners’ lives - natural, intellectual, academic, social, cultural, spiritual, aesthetic, and moral.

Our hope is that young men and women brought up in and exposed to such an environment will be able to release goodwill and positive energy to the larger society when they complete their studies and join it. Listening to the many speakers at the Leaders’ Forum over the past two days, I had a feeling that green schools might be an answer to the many anxieties and concerns that they expressed!

We entertain no illusions about the challenges such a programme presents. A GNH education programme is far more difficult to realize than a project that merely aims to increase test scores. But this is also the challenge that pursuing GNH itself is faced with as opposed to following a simplistic uni-dimensional GDP path.

But what we are seeing in our schools since the launch of the programme in 2010 is already deeply heartening. This is, perhaps, because educating for GNH is not a new fad or fashion imposed on the system. It is essentially a call to return to the core function, the fundamental objective, of education. Education must be an instrument of empowerment of individuals to be better human beings – be the best of being human, as it were.

Education needs a new ethic, a civilizational ethic, if you will, to respond to the needs of our time. The noble sector must rediscover and reassert its nobility. With the United Nations General Assembly having endorsed Bhutan’s proposal to include the pursuit of happiness as a goal for the family of nations to aspire for, the programme of educating for gross national happiness assumes even greater importance and urgency today.

On a more immediate note, we applaud the Director General and her team for the many critical structural and human resource development reforms that you have initiated to make the UNESCO more responsive and efficient in the delivery of its mandate.
On our part, Bhutan has mounted concerted efforts to realize the EFA as well as MDG targets. The results are seen in expanded enrollments, achievement of gender parity, lower drop-out rates and higher retention and completion levels. Strategic policy interventions and practical measures have started producing tangible results in provision as well as in quality enhancement.

The most important reform initiative will remain the GNH education programme. This project succeeding, Bhutan will be that much closer to being a veritable GNH society, and our education system will be that much closer to being the noble sector that it ought to be. Bhutan and the UNESCO working together, we will be able to realize the fullness of our potential and help build a world that we will be proud to leave behind.

May this dream be realized in our own time! Thank you! Tashi Delek!