



## UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Adoption of UPR Outcomes

#HRC58 • 24 March 2025

#### Bhutan



#### STATE UNDER REVIEW

The delegation of **Bhutan** thanks the Secretariat and our Troika members for their support during the entire review process. It also thanks all the Member States who participated in its review in November 2024 and for the valuable comments and recommendations that were made. Bhutan believes in the importance of the UPR as a necessary mechanism to enable a holistic assessment of the state of human rights. It appreciates the positive outcomes that it yields through dialogue and implementation of well thought out recommendations. It is in this spirit Bhutan remains **fully committed to the UPR** and acknowledges the progress made in improving the welfare of its citizens from implementing recommendations from the past three reviews.

Bhutan is a labourer in its commitment to further promote and protect human rights. As a country guided by the philosophy of cross national happiness, Bhutan views the promotion and protection of human rights as central to all its development objectives and economic empowerment as the foundation for enjoyment of all rights and a path to human dignity. In this regard, the welfare and happiness of its people is and will remain its national imperative.

However, it is important to mention here that Bhutan is a tiny country with several **geopolitical and socio-economic challenges**. Against this backdrop, the sovereignty, peace and security of our country is the supreme priority. Therefore, its discourse on promotion of human rights should be seen and contextualised from these lenses. Bhutan also appreciates that every country has its own approach to promotion of human rights. Bhutan is pleased to inform that it has **fully supported 124 and partially supported 11 recommendations of the 202 recommendations received**. The decision to support recommendations was made after careful consideration of feasibility, clear implementation timeframes, relevance to national context and existence of adequate policy and legislative frameworks.



Bhutan has taken **note of several recommendations**, most of which were predicated on unfounded assertions, inaccurate assumptions or false information. A recurring recommendation received in November 2024 was to ratify the remaining core human rights treaties, notably the UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT). In keeping with its gradual approach towards ratification of human rights instruments, Bhutan has accepted the recommendation to ratify the UNCAT.

The delegation further takes the opportunity to share some additional information on steps undertaken since the presentation of Brunei's national report in November 2024. Recognising the critical role played by CSOs in serving the nation by providing services to diverse sections of society throughout the country, including animal welfare, the Government will provide a grant of 300 million dollars to support CSOs delivering social mandates.

Against the backdrop that raising a child is not only a parent's responsibility, but also the responsibility of the family and community in the Government, Bhutan launched the **accelerating maternal and child health programme**, the 'Thousand Golden Days' initiative. The programme underscores the importance of the first thousand days as the foundation for a child's growth and development. Under this programme, conditional cash grants will be provided monthly for two years to pregnant women from socially and economically vulnerable backgrounds to ensure consistent access to health services throughout pregnancy and early childhood until the child attains two years of age.

The Royal Government approved the new education policy in December last year to provide a more **inclusive and equitable educational framework** covering all levels of education from early childhood care and development to lifelong learning. Furthermore, Bhutan's national school curriculum is in the process of being reformed to align with the standards set by the Cambridge International, which is globally recognised as a 21st century focused curriculum.

A prison-based substance use disorder treatment and care programme has been introduced to improve the well-being of inmates incarcerated for drug-related offences and reduce recidivism. Further, Bhutan recently launched the **open-air prisoners** reintegration programme to provide restorative and rehabilitative care and entrepreneurial opportunities by providing relevant training to enhance their job-related skills. To address homeownership, the government recently allocated 1.5 billion dollars to kick-start **affordable housing initiative** to enable people in the low-income group to own homes.

Bhutan recently launched the national action plan to promote **gender equality** in public administration. Under this plan, Bhutan aims to achieve 30% women representation in decision-making positions by 2029 in the civil service. In addition, a national strategy and framework of action on eliminating **gender-based violence** was launched early this month. The strategy seeks to eliminate gender-based violence through a multi-pronged approach that focusses on fostering gender equality, transforming social norms, strengthening data collection, and providing inclusive services that empower survivors to live free from violence.

To promote inclusive workplace in the private sector and encourage diversity, Bhutan last month launched the youth engagement and livelihood programme guideline. The guideline prioritises **employment of persons with disabilities** by waiving the requirements to meet the standard



recruitment criteria. In November 2024, Bhutan launched the 8 million USD initiative to advance disability inclusion through a structured programme framework. The initiative will address barriers faced by persons with disabilities in Bhutan.

To enhance the **child justice system** and to prioritise the best interest of children in conflict with laws, guidelines on diversion, child-friendly prosecution, access to legal aid, and guidelines to support child victims and protect child witnesses have been developed. In November last year, Royal Bhutan Police achieved nationwide coverage of **Women and Child Protection Desks**. All 20 districts in Bhutan now have a women and child protection desk. The Women and Child Protection Desks will strengthen and implement an effective women and child protection and response system through efficient service delivery.

Bhutan launched the 21st century economic roadmap in December last year. The vision provides a strategic roadmap for the country's long-term economic growth and development, guiding the country's economic policies, programmes, and investments. This year, the **Corruption Perception Index** has ranked Bhutan as the 18th least corrupt country, up from 26th place last year. This is a result of the efforts made in combating corruption, strengthening transparency, and fostering accountability. Corruption prevention strategies, including efforts to curb executive power abuse, promote transparency in public spending, and empowerment of media, CSOs, and the private sector in fostering integrity, have been instrumental and will continue to be prioritised.

On the **Global Peace Index**, Bhutan is ranked as the 21st most peaceful country in the world. Using these two indices as a measure of all-round progress in Bhutan, the delegation believes that Bhutan is among the most progressive countries in the world.

### UNHRC MEMBER AND OBSERVERS STATES

**Russia** notes with satisfaction Bhutan's completion of the fourth cycle of the UPR. It notes that Bhutan has adopted the vast majority of the recommendations, including one Russian one. Russia commends the steps taken by the country to strengthen legal instruments to protect human rights, including the new laws adopted for fulfilment of the recommendations made during the previous cycle of the UPR. It welcomes the Government's efforts to combat extreme poverty, ensure sustainable development, and improve access to health care and education. Russia recommends adopting the report on Bhutan's fourth cycle of the UPR.

**Singapore** congratulates the delegation of Bhutan on its successful fourth UPR and commends Bhutan for its constructive engagement with the UPR process and its careful consideration of the various recommendations put forward by delegations. It thanks Bhutan for accepting both of Singapore's recommendations requesting to continue to ensure access to quality health care services, including mental health services for all, and to continue its holistic efforts in dealing with the drug problem, particularly in the areas of rehabilitation and aftercare, as well as preventive education on the harm of drugs. Singapore encourages Bhutan to continue its efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights of its people in a manner best suited to its national context and circumstances. Singapore supports the adoption of the outcome report.

**Sri Lanka** commends the constructive engagement of Bhutan in its fourth UPR review cycle and acknowledges with appreciation Bhutan's acceptance of all four recommendations made by Sri Lanka. It further appreciates the efforts made by Bhutan in achieving universal health coverage



through a primary health care approach and commend Bhutan for receiving two prestigious public health achievement awards during the 77th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Southeast Asia held in October 2024. It encourages Bhutan to continue strengthening its people-centred development efforts, anti-corruption and clean government initiatives. Sri Lanka recommends the adoption of the fourth UPR report of Bhutan and wishes the Government of Bhutan success in its implementation.

**Venezuela** welcomes the delegation of Bhutan and thanks it for the presentation. It notes the cooperation with the UPR mechanism. These voluntary mechanisms, rather than imposed mechanisms, are those that provide best results for human rights. Venezuela welcomes the acceptance of the three recommendations made by Venezuela during the interactive dialogue related to strengthening public policy on gender equality, persons with disabilities, and children and adolescents. It urges Bhutan to continue implementing public policies to promote and protect human rights, including the right to development, addressing the challenges identified in the country. It wishes Bhutan every success in implementing the recommendations accepted during this fourth cycle and recommends adoption of the report.

**Viet Nam** commends the constructive engagement of the Royal Government of Bhutan in its fourth UPR review cycle and the careful consideration of various recommendations Bhutan received. It appreciates Bhutan's acceptance of all three recommendations made by Vietnam. Once again, Vietnam welcomes Bhutan's 13th five-year plan and initiatives aimed at enhancing social protection and mental health. This is a strong reflection of Bhutan's commitment to a holistic approach anchored in the concept of gross national happiness. It encourages Bhutan to continue its efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights of its people, consistent with its national conditions and traditions. Finally, Vietnam recommends the adoption of the fourth UPR report of Bhutan and wishes the Royal Government of Bhutan success in its implementation.

**Algeria** welcomes the delegation of Bhutan to the adoption of their UPR outcomes and thanks the delegation for the additional information provided. It notes with appreciation that Bhutan has accepted the two recommendations presented by Algeria. In conclusion, Algeria supports the adoption of Bhutan's UPR outcomes and wishes every success in the implementation stage.

**Botswana** welcomes the delegation of Bhutan to the adoption of the UPR outcome and commends Bhutan for supporting the majority of the recommendations received. Furthermore, it encourages the effective implementation of our recommendations, particularly the ratification of the UNCAT. Botswana supports the adoption of Bhutan's UPR outcome and wishes success in the implementation of supported recommendations.

**Brunei Darussalam** thanks the delegation of Bhutan for the updates given today on the positive developments since their review last year. Brunei is pleased to note that Bhutan has accepted 124 out of the 203 recommendations in full it received during its review, including the recommendations made by Brunei Darussalam in connection with universal free basic health care and mental health. This highlights the importance the country places on human rights alongside its gross national happiness philosophy. In this regard, Brunei recommends the adoption of the outcome report on Bhutan and wishes success in moving forward.



**Burkina Faso** commends the acceptance by Bhutan of 124 out of the 203 recommendations made during the review, including one of the two made by Burkina Faso. The latter reiterates its encouragement to Bhutan, accompanying the implementation of its ambitious five-year plan to 2029. In a constructive spirit, Burkina reiterates its invitation to continue its efforts to strengthen its legal framework to promote and protect human rights. In conclusion, it calls for the adoption of the report of Bhutan by consensus and encourages the delegation to ensure effective implementation of the recommendations supported.

**China** recognises Bhutan's constructive participation in the fourth cycle of the UPR work on its achievement in promoting and protecting human rights. Bhutan actively takes measures to increase input in education, health, employment and social security, effectively combat epidemics, corruption and human trafficking, and protect the rights of women. China hopes that Bhutan will continue to promote social and economic development, sustainable development and improve people's living standards. China would like to thank Bhutan for accepting China's recommendations and would wish the country greater success in promoting and protecting human rights. China supports the adoption of Bhutan's UPR outcome by the Council.

**Cuba** notes the country's commitment to the UPR, as demonstrated by the participation by the high-level delegation in the interactive dialogue headed by the Foreign Minister. Cuba is glad that Bhutan accepted Cuba's four recommendations. Cuba trusts that it will continue to propel forward the initiatives to provide young people with employment. Cuba encourages the country to continue to ensure inclusion and high quality of health and education as well as effective systems for social protection for vulnerable groups. Cuba notes the efforts by Bhutan to address the demographic issues and to provide better protection for older persons. It wishes Bhutan every success in implementing the recommendations accepted and supports the adoption of the report by consensus.

**Djibouti** welcomes the delegation of Bhutan and thanks it for the additional information with its focus on the country's efforts and commitments to promote and protect human rights. Djibouti also comments Bhutan's support for 124 out of 203 recommendations received during the fourth cycle of the UPR. In particular, it welcomes Bhutan's acceptance of two of the recommendations presented by Djibouti. It notes the explanations provided by Bhutan regarding the third recommendation made by Djibouti on ongoing development and strengthening of the legal framework and public policies to increase participation by women in political and public life which was noted and hopes that at the right time this may be considered and implemented. Djibouti wishes every success to Bhutan in the implementation of the recommendations accepted and recommends that the Council adopt the report on the fourth cycle of the UPR of Bhutan.

**Egypt** welcomes Bhutan's efforts to strengthen the promotion of human rights and commend its cooperation with human rights mechanisms including the UPR. Egypt welcomes the initiatives and programmes mentioned in the report which seek to improve the human rights situation at all levels and thanks the Government of Bhutan for accepting the three recommendations made by Egypt. In conclusion, it wishes Bhutan every success in its implementation and its efforts to promote human rights and encourage the Council to adopt the report by consensus.



**Eritrea** commends the Government for its constructive engagement in this important process and recognises Bhutan's efforts in advancing human rights, particularly its initiative to strengthen socio-economic development, promote environmental sustainability and enhance access to education and healthcare. It also commends Bhutan's commitment to cultural preservation and community-driven policies. These efforts reflect the country's commitment to a holistic approach to development guided by the principles of cross-national happiness. To conclude, Eritrea fully supports the adoption of Bhutan's UPR outcome document and extends its best wishes for the successful and effective implementation of the recommendations supported.

**India** warmly welcomes the delegation of Bhutan for the adoption of the UPR Working Group's report on its fourth UPR. The review shows substantive participation with delegations making a total of 203 recommendations. India appreciates the constructive engagement of the delegation of Bhutan during the entire review, which reflects their commitment to the UPR process. India appreciates that as many as 124 recommendations have been accepted by Bhutan, including the three recommendations made by India. While recommending the adoption of its UPR report, India congratulates the delegation of Bhutan on a successful review and wishes success in their efforts towards implementing the supported recommendations.

**Kuwait** welcomes the delegation of Bhutan and thanks it for the update with regard to the recommendations received in the framework of the UPR. It values Bhutan's support for 124 recommendations fully and 11 partially, as a positive step to promote and protect human rights. Kuwait also values Bhutan's support for the recommendations made by Kuwait on the improvement of the access to education in early childhood, especially in rural areas; continuing efforts in providing adequate health care to persons with disabilities; and continuing efforts to promote economic and social policies. In conclusion, it wishes all the success in implementing the recommendations and recommends the adoption of the UPR outcome report.

The **Lao PDR** commends Bhutan's constructive engagement during the UPR process and the progress made by the country in the promotion and protection of human rights, in particular the advancement of the rights of women through the adoption of national laws, guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for women, as well as increasing women's participation in all spheres of life. The Lao PDR is pleased to note that the government of Bhutan has accepted most of the recommendations received during the constructive dialogue, including the two recommendations made by the Lao PDR. It wishes Bhutan every success in the implementation of all accepted recommendations of the fourth cycle of UPR and encourages the Council to adopt the UPR outcome of Bhutan by consensus.

**Lesotho** commends Bhutan for its active engagement throughout the UPR process and its acceptance of a notable amount of the recommendations made during the fourth cycle. Lesotho congratulates Bhutan for its significant progress to its social and economic development, which is exemplified by its graduation from the Least Developed Countries category in 2023. Lesotho is encouraged by Bhutan's continued prioritisation of human rights, which is guided by the principle of gross national happiness and reflected in the country's most recent five-year plan. Furthermore, Bhutan's many initiatives to enhance the country's climate resilience and disaster response are noted with appreciation. To conclude, Lesotho wishes the government of Bhutan every success with its transformation into a high-income, 'gross national happiness' economy and



its implementation of the accepted recommendations. It recommends that the Council adopts the UPR outcome report on the fourth UPR of Bhutan.

### INTER-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND UN AGENCIES

**UNFPA** warmly congratulates Bhutan on completing the fourth UPR cycle and commends Bhutan on its continuous efforts to promote rights and choices for all, especially women and girls, the adoption of its first national strategy and framework of action on eliminating gender-based violence, the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the integration of comprehensive sexuality education into school curricula, and the decriminalisation of same-sex relations reflect Bhutan's progressive strides towards inclusivity and human rights. Bhutan's significant progress in reducing maternal mortality by 30% and child marriage by 15% over the past decade are equally admirable. UNFPA will continue working with Bhutan in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, preventing unintended pregnancies, strengthening gender equality and demographic resilience, as well as eliminating gender-based violence by prioritising young people and marginalised communities. UNFPA reaffirms its commitment to assist Bhutan in implementing UPR recommendations.

### OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

The **Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development** acknowledges Bhutan's acceptance of 124 out of 203 recommendations and its fourth UPR. Bhutan's failure to accept 68 recommendations, in particular those related to ethnic minorities, statelessness, political prisoners and refugee repatriation, underscores Bhutan's unwillingness to genuinely address its long-standing human rights concerns. Systematic discrimination against ethnic Nepali-speaking Bhutanese continues. Their language remains banned in schools. Their land seized and redistributed. Cultural symbols erased and citizenship revoked, rendering many stateless. The rejection of recommendations on improving prison conditions and release of political prisoners alongside false claims of international monitoring demonstrate Bhutan's intention to continue the unjust detention of political prisoners. The last ICRC visit was in 2012 and the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention last visited in 2019, both under government-controlled conditions. Despite repeated denials of the existence of political prisoners, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recently determined that the continuing imprisonment of three individuals constitutes arbitrary detention. The Working Group concluded that their detention is without legal basis for exercising fundamental freedom in denial of their rights in a fair trial and due process and is based on discriminatory ground. This reflects the reality of all political prisoners in Bhutan. Similarly, 6,500 out of 120,000 Bhutanese refugees forcefully evicted in the early 1990s remain stranded in Nepal waiting for dignified return. Not a single refugee has been repatriated. The Asian Forum calls for urgent action to grant amnesty to all political prisoners in Bhutan, repatriate Bhutanese refugees with dignity those willing to go back, restore revoked citizenship, resume Nepali language education, establish an independent National Human Rights Commission, grant tourist visas to resettle foreign Bhutanese to visit their families. These actions are not just necessary, they are crucial for justice and human rights in Bhutan.

The **Centre for Global Non-Killing** has two questions. The first one is philosophical. What are the direct links between happiness and human rights? In the Centre's humble opinion, they are mutually reinforcing and happiness brings more peaceful realisation for all human rights. The



second question is practical. The right to happiness is a fulfilment of life, but at the other end of the spectrum, genocide is one of the worst ways to treat life and the right to life. Genocide is worse than making people unhappy. In this perspective, the Centre asks the delegation to explain why Bhutan notes recommendations demanding the ratification of the Convention on the Prevention and the Punishment of the Crime of Genocide? Last but not least, the Centre congratulates Bhutanese filmmakers and supporters for the very good film, *The Monk and the Gun*. Waiting for replies and your actions, the Centre conveys its best wishes for the implementation of all UPR recommendations received.

**Human Rights Watch (HRW)** welcomes Bhutan's commitment to ratify the UNCAT and calls on the Government to prove its intentions by ending ongoing abuses against those in Government detention. At the same time, Bhutan did not accept recommendations to ratify core human rights treaties, including the ICCPR and the ICESCR. HRW has documented cases of at least 32 political prisoners serving long sentences in dire conditions in Bhutan jails. They were allegedly tortured to extract confessions and did not receive fair trials. Bhutan did not support numerous recommendations relating to the rights of prisoners. Bhutan stated that the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention had been allowed to visit prisons most recently in 2019, but omitted to mention that the recommendations of its highly critical report have not been implemented. Bhutan also cited a series of cases by the ICRC, but failed to mention that these ended in 2012. HRW was disappointed that Bhutan failed to support recommendations relating to the independence of civil society and freedom of expression, recommendations on legalising abortion, criminalising marital rape, upholding citizenship rights, ending ethnic discrimination, recognising the rights to return of refugees, establishing an independent national human rights institution, and extending a standing invitation to Special Procedures were also not noted. Bhutan has cultivated an image of practising enlightened government in pursuit of oppression across national ethnics, but its refusal to respect fundamental rights as demonstrated in its UPR shows that the reality is often different. HRW hopes that the UNHRC and countries will continue to press Bhutan to match its progressive government rhetoric with an end to human rights violations.

According to **Advocates for Human Rights**, Bhutan has demonstrated active efforts to establish laws and policies that align with international human rights standards, including the abolition of the death penalty in 2004 and its constitutional prohibition against capital punishment. During the UPR, member states commended Bhutan for its commitment to protecting, promoting, and implementing human rights through legislation, policies, and other measures. The Advocates for Human Rights and the World Coalition Against the Death Penalty remain concerned, however, that Bhutan noted Iceland's recommendation to ratify the second Optional Protocol (OP II) to the ICCPR aiming at the abolition of the death penalty, despite having abolished the death penalty more than two decades ago. While Bhutan has expressed its intention to consider acceding to human rights treaties through study and consultation among national stakeholders based on national needs, priorities, and capabilities, it declined to take such action on OP II. Bhutan's demonstrated commitment to human rights and its longstanding abolitionist status have laid the groundwork for ratification of OP II, which would solidify its commitment to the abolition of the death penalty. Therefore, the NGO recommends that Bhutan take all necessary steps to sign and ratify OP II without reservations and request technical assistance to carry out the necessary steps towards ratification.





**Rajasthan Samgrah Kalyan Sansthan (RSKS)** notably appreciates the progress made by Bhutan ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, demonstrating its commitment to disability rights and social inclusion. Bhutan's role in climate action and environmental protection is equitable and foreseeable. Despite progress, challenges remain. RSKS appeals to Bhutan to take positive steps in this direction, continuing efforts to combat gender-based violence and ensuring access to justice and sufficient support services for survivors; expanding measures to enhance race, freedom and the role of civil society, fostering a more open and participatory democratic space; further increase women's representation in political and economic spheres to achieve gender parity at all levels of decision-making; consider ratifying four international human rights treaties, including the ICCPR and the UNCAT. RSKS supports Bhutan's constructive engagement in the UPR process and encourages continued collaboration with international mechanisms and civil society to ensure inclusivity in the sustainable human rights process.

#### **FACTS & FIGURES ON UPR OUTCOMES**

- 203** Recommendations Received
- 124** Recommendations Supported
- 11** Recommendations Partially Supported
- 68** Recommendations Noted

#### **FACTS & FIGURES ON PARTICIPATION**

- 18** State Delegations
- 1** UN Agency
- 5** Non-Governmental Organizations