Statement by His Excellency Mr. Kinga Singye, Foreign Secretary,
Royal Government of Bhutan
Comprehensive High-level Mid Term Review of the Vienna Programme of Action
5 December 2019, New York

Mr. President
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honour to participate in the High-level Mid Term Review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries.

I join other delegations in thanking the President of the General Assembly for convening this important meeting and align my statement with those delivered on behalf of G77 and LLDC Group.

The VPoA constitutes an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its timely and effective implementation can greatly contribute to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

Bhutan welcomes this Mid-Term Review and adoption of the Political Declaration. Bhutan had the honour to co-facilitate the intergovernmental negotiations of the Political Declaration with Austria, with whom we were privileged to work. We thank all delegations for their constructive engagement and cooperation, and the OHRLLS for their support and guidance. As many have noted, the Political Declaration is not only concise, action-oriented, and forward-looking, but also succinctly captures the issues and challenges of LLDCs and highlights the essential areas that should continue to garner focus during the second half of the decade for the implementation of the VPoA.

Assessments on the performance of LLDCs have been mixed. It is clear that more needs to be done, and at a faster pace, if the LLDCs are to achieve the objectives of the VPoA in the remaining 5 years of the decade. This High-level MTR should provide the momentum required to fully implement the VPoA by the LLDCs, transit countries and development partners. As UNCTAD has mentioned in their review, a new generation of policies and additional actions are needed to achieve the goals of the programme by 2024.

Mr. President,
I am happy to report that Bhutan has made significant progress in the implementation of the VPoA. Bhutan has achieved stable economic growth over the last five years, enhanced social development through reduction of both income and multidimensional poverty, and improved infrastructure for access and connectivity. If all goes well, Bhutan will be the first LLDC to graduate from the LDC category in December 2023.

Our development priorities have evolved from building basic infrastructure to investing in services and boosting the economy. Guided by the development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, Bhutan has made
tremendous progress in all areas of social development since the launch of the planned development process in 1961. In the last 10 years alone, GDP in Bhutan has more than tripled and per capita income has doubled. Sectoral share of agriculture has gone down from 43% to 17% while the share of industry has increased from 12% to 41% reflecting the structural transformation of the economy.

Despite the progress, various cross-cutting challenges still confront us. Halfway through the VPoA decade, Bhutan faces significant challenges arising from constraints associated with being landlocked, having a small population, limited economic diversification, high costs of trade and limited regional and international market integration.

Mr. President,

For Bhutan, structural economic transformation and productive capacity building including through skills development are key national priorities in achieving the VPoA. We need to expand investments into tourism, organic agriculture, and cottage and small industries, and establish an entrepreneurship ecosystem to provide a platform for innovation to generate jobs with the participation of corporate and private sectors.

In line with our national objective of self-reliance, domestic resource mobilization is being accorded high priority. As a result of prudent fiscal management, the Royal Government is currently able to finance up to 64% of its development expenditure through domestic revenue. Bhutan is also implementing the Bhutan for Life program, an innovative green financing mechanism to augment its resource requirements for conservation of the environment.

Bhutan will continue to undertake key initiatives in the current national development plan cycle to address challenges. As science, technology and innovation can play a catalytic role in advancing our national efforts, we request development partners to help us build capacity in these areas as well as in e-commerce readiness and local capability building.

Bhutan will continue its efforts to strengthen regional and international partnerships through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, particularly in exchanging best practices and technical assistance.

In conclusion, we join fellow LLDCs in calling for the reaffirmation of global commitments and strengthening of global partnerships to address the special needs of LLDCs to accelerate the implementation of VPoA in the remaining five years. We need to see renewed and strengthened international solidarity and partnership to strengthen the resilience and response of LLDCs who are amongst the most vulnerable to impacts of climate change.

It is our expectation that the outcome of today’s deliberations will promote greater solidarity and provide impetus to deliver on the hopes and aspirations of over half a billion people in our 32 countries.

I thank you, Tashi Delek!