Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

It is a privilege to present to you the new Common Country Programme for 2014-2018, for Bhutan, developed jointly with UNDP and UNFPA.

Guided by its development approach of Gross National Happiness (GNH), Bhutan has largely determined the spirit, content and pace of its sustainable development agenda. Encompassing good governance, environmental conservation, cultural preservation and community vitality, in addition to traditional socio-economic indicators, the country’s unique concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) promotes a balanced approach to development.

In 2008 Bhutan, adopted the Delivering as One approach, which aims to increase the effectiveness and impact of the United Nations through more coherent programming and reduced transaction costs. Taking this one step further, UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA in Bhutan agreed to develop a Common Country Programme document for 2014 to further increase harmonization and consistency within the UN.

The previous programme, which was extended for one year, saw impressive gains in primary school enrolment with a gender parity index of 1.02 in primary school, and 1.18 in secondary school in favour to girls. It saw 1,200 trained village health workers who provide treatment for minor ailments and injuries, screen children on malnutrition and promote safe hygiene practices.
The adoption of a National Plan of Action for Child Protection in 2012 further advanced Bhutan’s shift to child protection systems building. For the first time, the Government’s 11th Five Year Plan will explicitly address child protection systems strengthening.

Based on Bhutan MICS data, a Two-Stage Disability Study among children aged 2 to 9 years provided a clearer understanding on the number of children with special needs, leading to an increased focus on early childhood care and development (ECCD) services, including an opportunity for C4D interventions in non-formal education.

[Slide 3 – Challenges: baby child eating egg]

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, Bhutan has made great strides in improving social outcomes in health and education. Some MDG indicators such as under-five mortality and maternal mortality need much more attention. Chronic malnutrition is also a concern with 34% stunting among under 5 and high rates of anaemia among boys and girls.

Despite availability and coverage of health services, 31 per cent of births are still not attended by skilled birth attendants and 37 per cent of deliveries still occur outside health facilities hindering efforts to reduce newborn mortality.

Bhutan ranks in the lower middle-income bracket of the World Bank classification of national economies yet remains on the list of least developed countries. According to 2012 figures, 23% of Bhutan’s population live on less than $1.25 a day with pockets of high income poverty, especially in remote and rural areas.

[Slide 4 – One Programme Outcome Areas: crowd of school children]

The new common Country Programme will make critical contributions towards the development needs of women and children in Bhutan through the Delivery as One programme outcome areas. The programme is the result of joint analysis and extensive consultations with, the Government of Bhutan, UNDP and UNFPA but also with wider partners.

Within the Delivery as One, UNICEF will be a lead agency on improving equitable access and use of quality services for vulnerable and marginalized groups. Technical and financial
assistance in piloting innovative approaches as well as initiating scaling up will contribute to strengthen the enabling environment and improve the quality of service delivery.

[Slide 5 – Strategic Shifts for Children and Adolescents: child monks]

Reflecting a changing context, strategic shifts in the common country programme include greater attention to the rapidly growing youth and urban populations. Stronger efforts will also be made to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in remote areas.

Additional investments will improve quality and equitable access to education, especially rural and out-of-school children. Urbanization is an important emerging challenge with more than 31 per cent of the total population living in urban areas. By 2020, this percentage is expected to increase to between 50% and 73%. Protection issues concern youths, adolescents at-risk from substance abuse and gender-based violence which needs special attention. Nearly one in four ever-married women aged 15-49 reported experiencing some form of domestic violence involving their husbands. Furthermore, 68% of women report accepting attitude toward domestic violence.

[Slide 6 – Programme approaches and Strategies: Bhutan child]

Intensive engagement with partners helped develop the new CCPD, following bottleneck analysis across three dimensions: i) Policy and enabling environment; ii) Systems and services; and iii) Demand promotion. The result is a more relevant, evidence-informed and balanced approach between upstream policy engagement, strengthening service delivery, and community level empowerment.

[Slide 7 – 2014-2018 Planned Results (1): school children in class]

Through innovative pilot approaches, support will be provided to ensure equitable access to quality education, assessment of learning outcomes, and promoting demand as well as early child care and development service availability.

The capacity of civil society and national, district and block-level Government institutions will be strengthened to reduce under-five and maternal mortality, and prevent HIV and malnutrition.
Cognizant of the specific needs of youths in Bhutan, the three organisations will contribute to improved access to and utilization of youth-friendly services with a focus on reaching the most vulnerable youth, thereby contributing to the implementation of the National Youth Policy and Action Plan.

Demonstrating a system approach, the United Nations will work together with partners to address child protection and gender-based violence with a focus on increasing access to and quality of appropriate services — prevention, early interventions and protective response — whilst strengthening coordination across government and other service providers and address social norms, attitudes and practices.

Maintaining the progress of ‘Delivering as One UN’ which has led to coherent programmes, reduced transaction costs and streamlined processes/procedures is an essential element of the programme. A One UN office will be operationalized by end of 2013 thus achieving another milestone for a harmonised UN coordination.

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates, the new Bhutan Common Country Programme seeks to address fundamental development challenges and demonstrates our commitment to the principles of UN reform and our desire to work closely with other UN agencies, each according to our mandate and comparative advantage. I am proud to say that this programme will make a real difference to the lives of women and children in Bhutan.

Before concluding I am showing you the mandala that reflects both the Buddhist approach to life and the basic child rights framework. In Sanskrit, mandala means circle or centre. The centre is the house, and in this case the child is placed in the centre, surrounded by a series of circles and squares symbolizing the provisions and principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Using the mandala in this context helps to promote greater understanding of and consensus on the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention.

Tashi Delek!