

Address by Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen at the Inaugural session of the 3rd PEMA Symposium.

As we come together for the Third PEMA Symposium, we renew our collective promise to place the well-being of our children and adolescents at the heart of Bhutan's future. This year's theme: "Investing in Children and Adolescents' Mental Health and Well-Being" is especially close to my heart. As a mother, and as someone who believes that our children embody the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of Bhutan, I feel deeply the responsibility we all share to protect and nurture their well-being.

At our previous symposiums, I shared how mental health must be seen as the cornerstone of our collective well-being. This belief continues to guide us today. No matter how much progress we make in education, health, or development, we cannot flourish as a society if our children do not feel safe, supported, and able to grow with confidence and joy.

In today's world, children everywhere are growing up in the midst of profound global challenges. From wars and famine to instability, hardship, and uncertainty about the future, it is the youngest and most vulnerable who often bear the deepest impact. Even when they are not directly affected, the constant awareness of such struggles can shape their sense of safety and belonging. This call on us to remember that our duty to protect, nurture, and empower young minds is not only a national priority - it is a universal responsibility.

We are blessed to live in peace and stability, yet like every society, we too face challenges. For some of our children, this means growing up without the care, support, and voice they deserve, and it is our shared duty to meet this truth with compassion, honesty, and the will to change it.

Since the establishment of the PEMA Secretariat three years ago, important progress has been made. I am happy to share that child protection cases are now immediately referred to the Secretariat, and services are activated within a turnaround time of just five hours. Where it once took 10 to 15 days for a child to receive protection, today services are provided within the first 24 hours. This is possible because of the tireless dedication of our protection officers working in close collaboration with the Royal Bhutan Police and the Office of the Attorney General.

But we know this is only the beginning. Our children deserve a system that not only responds to harm but also actively promotes well-being, nurtures resilience, and prevents harm before it occurs. They deserve homes and schools where they feel safe, loved, and supported; communities that hear their voices and empower them to thrive; and services that are sensitive to their needs.

Making this vision a reality will require courage, compassion, and unity. It is a task that calls upon all of us - families, schools, health professionals, policymakers, and every part of society. And in this shared duty, we need look no further for guidance than the leadership of our Kings.

The vision of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, who gifted us the timeless philosophy of Gross National Happiness, placed well-being firmly at the heart of development, long before the world began to recognise happiness and well-being as essential measures of progress.

His Majesty The King has carried this legacy forward with wisdom and foresight, guiding Bhutan through profound change while ensuring that our children remain at the very center of our national priorities. With a special focus on empowering young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world, His Majesty's initiatives - from Desuung, which instills discipline, service, and values of community; to Gyalsung, which will empower every young Bhutanese with skills and purpose; and now the Gelephu Mindfulness City, envisioned as a

gateway of opportunity rooted in mindfulness and well-being; are all created with the future of Bhutan's youth in mind.

Together, their visionary leadership reminds us that true progress is not measured in short-term gains but in the lives we shape for future generations. Their legacy calls on us to always place our children and young people at the heart of our long-term goals, for it is in their well-being and potential that the future of Bhutan will be secured.

I am deeply grateful to the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, the Royal Bhutan Police, the Office of the Attorney General, the Royal Civil Service Commission, and our development partners for your steadfast support.

Together, we are launching Bhutan's first National Mental Health Strategy, a holistic and people-centered path forward that ensures mental health services are accessible to every citizen. This strategy will guide the future of mental health care in our country. It is a reflection of our collective commitment to place well-being at the very heart of Bhutan's journey ahead. With the dedication of our people, our professionals, and our institutions, I believe we can build a Bhutan that is not only stronger and more resilient, but one where every child and adolescent is able to flourish.

For the future will always belong to those who care for the hearts and minds of children today. If we give them safety, kindness and hope, they will give the world a tomorrow filled with harmony, compassion, love and light.