

OPENING ADDRESS*

Your Excellency, Honourable Minister and Delegates from the Royal Government of Bhutan, distinguished guests from more than 30 countries around the globe, fellow Canadians: As the representative of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, our Queen of Canada, and on behalf of all Nova Scotians, I am honoured to welcome the delegates to this international conference, “Rethinking Development: Local Pathways to Global Wellbeing”. Since the early 1600s when the indigenous Mi’kmaq met the first European explorers, there has been a proud tradition of welcoming the world to Nova Scotia. We, in this province, are blessed with an abundance of natural resources, breathtaking scenery, diverse cultures, and warm friendly people who cherish peace and friendship and we are happy to share our blessing with all of you.

This remarkable gathering of talented and experienced men and women brings together some of the world’s leading practitioners of socially and environmentally responsible development. Nova Scotians are truly delighted and deeply honoured that you have travelled to join us from the four corners of the earth – literally from six continents – to share your knowledge and your wisdom, to teach us, to work together, and to guide us all forward towards the kind of world we genuinely want to leave our children.

Your work and your presence here are eloquent testimony to the reality that a better world and a brighter future are not only possible, but a necessity. Very many of you have done outstanding work promoting economic wellbeing in ways that respect and care deeply for people and for the environment. Heartiest congratulation to His Majesty the King of Bhutan and the citizens of Bhutan for their recent receipt of the United Nations Champion of the Earth award, received for placing the environment at the centre of all its development policies. Congratulations to Bunker Roy of India, awarded the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, to Farouk Jiwa of Kenya, awarded the Equator Prize for sustainable community livelihoods, to Father Francisco VanderHoff, who started the fair trade movement, and to all of you who are undisputed leaders in charting a new path to a better future.

This gathering in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, was inspired by the profound recognition of His Majesty the King of Bhutan more than 30

* Hon’ble Myra A. Freeman, a Canadian philanthropist, teacher and the first female and Jewish Lieutenant Governor General of Nova Scotia (2002-2006).

years ago that “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product,” and it grew from the First International Conference on Gross National Happiness held in Thimphu last year. For the Bhutanese, wellbeing arises in a society when sustainable and equitable economic development is balanced with environmental and cultural preservation and good governance. But that, surely, is an aspiration for all peoples and all societies everywhere – not only in Bhutan. Certainly here in Nova Scotia we aspire to create such a good and decent society right here on this very land; more than that, we truly aspire to be a beacon of good and balanced development from which others can learn and draw inspiration.

In the midst of these lofty aspirations, we are also realists. We do not claim to have all the answers, we all face significant challenges, and we know that we have a long way to go. But if we join forces, and if we are truly willing to listen and to learn from each other, we can all move beyond our own limitations to build a better world. We are so proud and honoured to host this Second International Conference on Gross National Happiness here in Nova Scotia, to have this amazing opportunity to learn from your incredible experiences, and to join with you all to Rethink Development and to chart together significant local pathways to global wellbeing. You are economists, educators, environmental scientists, farmers, builders, musicians, government officials, community activists, and philosophers – literally all the elements of what it takes to create a good society. May you all work together harmoniously and creatively in the coming days to lead us forward to the future we want to leave to our children. It gives me great pleasure to declare this noteworthy conference officially open.
