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**STATEMENT by**

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***Living GNH: Making a Full Policy  
Commitment to Organic Agriculture***

Delivered at the Opening Session of the  
International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements  
Sustainable Development Learning Event at UNCSO Rio+20

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Room T-6, Rio Centro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**My dear friend and colleague, Dr Vandana Shiva. Esteemed members and delegates of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements,**

I cannot express how delighted I am to be with you this morning here in Rio. Nor could I wish to begin my engagements in Rio in any other way! After all, the best way to launch any endeavour is to go back to basics. And nothing is more basic than food!

Indeed, your theme of the day — Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture — should be the starting point for everything that will happen here in Rio in the coming days. Without food security, there is no other kind of security. And without sustainable agriculture, there is no food security.

It really is as straightforward as that! Even military experts have written that the ability to feed one's own people in a time of global instability, conflict, and insecurity is more important for national security than any army or military might. The United Nations itself has said (and I quote) "Fertile land with access to water has become a strategic asset."

And yet, increasingly, we cannot take that most basic of all securities for granted. Globally, soils are eroding much faster than they can form. According to one Cornell University study, India and China are losing soil 40 times faster than it is replenished, with 30% of the world's arable land rapidly becoming unproductive due to erosion. It takes 500 years for a single inch of topsoil to form, yet the planet is losing 24 billion tons of it every year.

But it is not only erosion and outright soil loss that threaten the world's food security. Land is being severely degraded through nutrient depletion, biodiversity loss, acid rain, and soil compaction. Agricultural chemicals are polluting water sources. Insects are becoming resistant to pesticides. And, even as 1.3 billion of the world's people will go to bed hungry tonight, more grain is now being fed to cattle and cars than to people.

Food, says Lester Brown, "the foundation of civilization, is crumbling."

It doesn't have to be that way! And there is only one way for it not to be that way! That is through making agriculture genuinely sustainable — working with nature to enhance rather than degrade our precious soil and water, and to farm in such a way as to enrich rather than deplete soil nutrients.

I think one of the world's biggest myths is that going organic is a choice. From the perspective of food security, there is no choice. Simple survival — and what Lester Brown calls "civilization" — demand it and require it. Food security is that basic, and what you will discuss in this IFOAM learning event here today should be the basis and starting point of all that will occur in the Summit that begins here tomorrow.

What the world's leaders would learn, if they were here with you today, is a message not of despair but of real hope: — That humankind has the ability to feed everyone on earth healthily and sustainably. That no-one need go hungry or live in grinding poverty. That sustainable farming is fully viable economically just as it is an ecological imperative. That it will improve our health and enhance our quality of life. That we can live, and live well, in full harmony with nature.

Indeed, the world's leaders need to listen for another very practical reason too. More than half the population of most countries represented here at Rio live off the land. In my own country, as in many parts of Asia and Africa, nearly two-thirds of our people are farmers. If we are to represent our own people faithfully, we all need to learn what you are offering here today.

And beyond these most basic of all necessities — food and farming as “the foundation of civilization” — there is another, equally hopeful yet perhaps more subtle, reason that I am so grateful and happy to share my first formal Rio engagement with you. (Applause). Even as I pray that the Summit about to start tomorrow will produce the decisive action needed to save life on this planet, we here know that critical action, guidance and advocacy have come and will continue to come from you and other key civil society groups like yours.

Indeed, what I find most encouraging in this moment of life-threatening planetary crisis is the powerful surge of activity from civil society movements around the world — taking the lead where governments fear to tread, and giving courageous expression to humankind’s basic goodness and inherent wisdom. This energy will and must generate the political will to act.

We could not have experienced or witnessed a more powerful expression of that people’s dynamic than at the United Nations headquarters on 2nd April this year where we launched a major initiative for a new development paradigm. Setting human happiness and the wellbeing of all life on earth as its goal, the key conditions identified for the new paradigm are ecological sustainability, fair distribution, and efficient use of resources. The new model calls for a healthy balance among natural, human, social, cultural, and built assets.

That day at the United Nations, it became clear to all present that what we need to do is far more than simply tinkering with the present system, which sadly is what characterizes so much of the mainstream dialogue on the so-called green economy or sustainable development.

We agreed, instead, on the need for a real and viable alternative to our conventional economic system which, fuelled by mindless consumerism, has depleted resources, degraded ecosystem services, accelerated greenhouse gas emissions, diminished biodiversity, and now threatens the survival of humans and other species on the planet. We acknowledged that this present system has created yawning inequities, and is generating global economic insecurity, indebtedness, instability, and conflict.

While we were deeply honoured on 2nd April to be joined by the President of Costa Rica, the United Nations Secretary-General, and ministers and diplomats from around the world, it was also quite clear that the real energy, dynamism, vision, clear thinking, and heart-felt will to act emanated that day from the hundreds of civil society leaders and brilliant scholars and analysts who participated with admirable enthusiasm.

And so it is to you that we politicians must look to continue to take the lead; to persuade, push, and cajole governments to act; and above all to set an example as you, indeed, are doing so magnificently — showing in actual practice what works, and demonstrating convincingly how to live life well in harmony with nature. That example truly matters:

I cannot imagine, for example, Dr. Vandana Shiva’s work carrying the extraordinary weight it does worldwide, for example, if not for her superb Bija Vidyapeeth organic training farm in Dehradun in India. That’s where we have sent our own Bhutanese farmers and agriculture officials for hands-on training, and it’s from there that top farmer trainers and soil scientists are regularly despatched to Bhutan to train our own farmers in organic methods. We have learned so much from them — perhaps, most importantly, that going organic means very much more than just not using chemicals; that organic is a whole system of working intelligently and with deep understanding of nature. Our farmers are being convinced that by working in harmony with nature, they can help sustain the flow of nature’s bounties.

What I am saying here is that — even among the powerful civil society movements — your work and the work of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements stand out. This is because you are actively and literally sowing the seeds, nurturing, growing, modelling, and putting into practice the new society of the future, whose power, paradoxically, stems from its root in the most ancient wisdom!

And so, as we promote the new development model that the world so urgently needs, one of our best ways to demonstrate its practical viability and to fend off possible accusations of finger-painting in the sky, is to point to earthy, living models like your highly successful work in organic farming. And I am using the word `earthy` in both senses of the term! Your work provides solid ground on which to stand!

Our reliance on the innovation, dynamism, and commitment of IFOAM and other outstanding civil society organisations, does not mean governments have an excuse to stand idle. The Royal Government of Bhutan on its part, will relentlessly promote and continue with its endeavour to realize the dreams we share of bringing about a global movement to return to organic agriculture so that the crops, and the earth on which they grow, will become genuinely sustainable — and so that agriculture will contribute not to the degradation but rather to the resuscitation and revitalization of nature.

It is to this end that my government has pledged to become 100% organic in food production (applause), and will develop a full-fledged National Organic Policy. We already have a National Organic Framework, a draft National Organic Standard, a Strategic Action Plan for organic development, and a national Participatory Guarantee System programme being initiated for the domestic organic market.

Our National Organic Program, guided by a 13-member multi-agency technical team, is presently training every agriculture extension officer in the country in organic methods, so that the primary extension tool for agriculture nationwide is organic. In fact, farmer groups choosing to go organic are given priority in development and technical services. And we have here the man behind all this, our Minister of Agriculture and Forests, Lyonpo Pema Gyamtsho. (Applause).

But our commitment to ecologically responsible action goes beyond agriculture. It also explains why the forests of our country have been nurtured to expand their coverage to 80% of our territory, and that 50% of our land has been brought under full environmental protection in national parks and wilderness areas. Likewise, it is for this reason that Bhutan vowed at Copenhagen to remain a net carbon sink for ever. (Applause) A very big commitment but absolutely essential.

And it is because such actions must go global before it is too late that we organized and hosted that meeting at the United Nations of which I spoke. In this regard, it was just four days ago that I had the privilege of handing over a full report of that landmark gathering to the UN Secretary-General in New York for distribution to all UN member states.

Separately I have also written to the Heads of State and Government of all the nations presently gathered in Rio, with a request to take specific policy actions to begin moving towards the new economic system. Among the 12 policy recommendations I sent to the leaders are the following two that have special relevance to this learning event (and I quote):

1. “In order to move towards sustainable production methods, governments should first remove perverse subsidies for fossil fuels (applause), chemical inputs in agriculture, and other activities that are harmful to the economy and environment.”

Second recommendation is (and I quote):

2. “In order to move rapidly towards sustainable agriculture, governments should support small-scale local production and consumption; ensure public procurement from sustainable local sources; invest in rural sector public goods including farmer education in organic methods; and incorporate traditional knowledge into agriculture research and development.” (Applause)

His Majesty the King of Bhutan is now convening an international expert working group to elaborate the details of the new development model. Recommendations of this group shall then be tabled at the United Nations for consideration by the 68th session of the General Assembly in 2013. With the advice and help of experts in organic agriculture, the working group shall give prominence to creating a practical blueprint for global and national policy actions, regulatory and financial mechanisms (including systems of incentives and penalties), fair trade systems, and institutional structures required to move the world systemically towards universal organic farming.

In short, as you continue to take the lead, create the shining models, and prove what works at the farm and market level, I believe it will be both politically expedient and morally responsible for governments to observe, learn, follow and then implement systemically what you are demonstrating as not only sustainable and healthy but economically viable and indeed profitable as well.

I now beg your indulgence as I try to explain what going organic means to us in the Kingdom of Bhutan. I mentioned that our stated policy goal is to become the first nation in the world to be fully 100% organic, with the ‘raised in Bhutan’ label synonymous with ‘organically grown.’ This aspiration is directly inspired and mandated by our profound development approach.

Ever since our Fourth King proclaimed three decades ago that “Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product”, my country has been on a unique development path. Through this, we seek to integrate and harmonize sustainable and equitable socio-economic development with conserving and caring for our natural world, strengthening our cultural heritage, and promoting good governance. These in fact are the four pillars on the basis of which the edifice of happiness is to be built.

And to ensure we do not stray from the path, we have put in place a mandatory screening tool that subjects all major policies and projects to a lens that assesses their likely impact in all these areas against 72 variables. Indeed, no major policy is implemented in Bhutan if it fails the GNH indicator test. That’s why, for example, Bhutan has not yet joined the World Trade Organization (applause) — because the WTO failed our GNH indicator test. (Applause).

The seriousness of our pursuit of GNH is further manifest in our Constitution which stipulates that at least 60% of the Kingdom of Bhutan remain under forest cover in perpetuity. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, forest cover today has actually increased to about 80% despite population growth, agricultural expansion, and urban encroachment. Aside from our commitments to protected areas, remaining a net carbon sink, and going organic, there’s a lot more we do in protecting and strengthening biodiversity, watersheds, wildlife corridors, cultural heritage, local wisdom, and more. Suffice to say that we place the natural environment, culture, equity, and sustainability at the centre of all our development policies.

Of what may be of particular interest to you is that a central theme for our upcoming eleventh five-year development plan will be (and I quote) “rural prosperity and urban wellbeing.” Without a strong

agriculture sector and vibrant rural communities, we know we cannot bring GNH to the majority of our people who are in the farms. And it is on the farms and in the rural setting that we would like to enable our people to stay on, by delivering to them efficient and effective social services while offering innovative ways to supplement their income.

In this regard, we expect organic farming to significantly increase farm income in rural communities. But the main reason why we would like to motivate rural living is because we are convinced that it is on the farm that people can find happiness amid vital communities boosted by the necessity of interdependence, active spiritual life, and daily communion with nature and other living beings.

I have always seen our Fourth King's wisdom in leading Bhutan on this balanced development path as an extraordinary gift not only to Bhutan but to a bewildered and deeply troubled world that is obsessed with material gain and destroying our natural life support systems.

This holistic development approach that we call Gross National Happiness or GNH, also enables us to understand and appreciate the broader ramifications and indeed benefits of going organic in a way that can dispel simplistic notions of organic farming. For us in Bhutan, going organic is literally treading the GNH path. It is about strengthening the four GNH pillars of ecological resilience, socio-economic wellbeing, good governance, and cultural promotion.

Even though I am fully aware that I am stating the obvious before such a learned audience, I cannot resist listing why our farmers are beginning to understand the multidimensional value of organic farming and how it strengthens the four pillars of happiness.

First, going organic will enrich and keep our soils healthy and fertile in perpetuity rather than degrading and depleting them through use of synthetic chemicals. Going organic will protect our precious ground water and surface water from pollution and fertilizer run-off. It will protect our biodiversity, and save our birds and animals from the deadly effects of chemical pollution.

Second, going organic will create new economic opportunities for farmers and rural communities both by adding value to what they produce and by reducing the costs of farming, since they'll no longer have to pay for expensive imported seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and other chemicals.

And going organic will provide significant economic opportunities for our country as a whole. The Indian demand for organic products will grow exponentially with little reason for it to become ever satiated. We want to establish Bhutan as a global training centre and laboratory for organic agriculture, and through this hopefully to provide a major spur to organic growing worldwide.

Third, going organic will strengthen the governance pillar of GNH. It will empower farmers by reducing their dependence on external inputs, and by creating local seed sovereignty and innovation that will only strengthen their independence and self-esteem. It will increase reliance on local wisdom, traditional farming methods, and freely available local materials like manure, biomass, and leaf compost that fertilize and enrich the soil.

In our national quest for self-reliance, I even see our farmers and business combining to develop our own organic fertilizers and pest control agents using natural materials based in the rich medicinal flora for which Bhutan is renowned. Scientists from Navdanya have just completed a careful analysis of Bhutan's native flora and identified a range of locally available biological pest control agents in collaboration with our farmers.

And fourth, and perhaps, most importantly, going organic will strengthen our culture and rural communities. By creating good economic opportunities for our educated youth in rural areas, we can begin to stem the massive rural-urban migration that has created such serious demographic,

economic, and social stresses everywhere. That in turn will keep our rural communities with their networks of social supports, vibrant extended families, and mutual dependence strong and vital.

In short, I reiterate: Going organic is living GNH. (Applause). Going organic is not only fulfilling an explicit promise of Bhutan's first democratically elected government. It is also key to putting GNH fully into practice and action.

I am most grateful to IFOAM, and to Dr. Andre Leu and Dr. Vandana Shiva in particular, for their kind and generous assistance in this endeavour – thank you! – and for working with us nationally to take 'organic' from the fringe to the mainstream in the Kingdom of Bhutan. Indeed, Bhutan's direct association with IFOAM was greatly strengthened through Dr. Leu's visits to Bhutan last year and again this year, first as Vice-President and then President of IFOAM, in training our Ministry staff, building partnerships, and helping include Bhutan in the Global Organic Market Access project.

May I extend my nation's sincere gratitude to you all in the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements for your extraordinary and pioneering exertion in 116 countries around the world, working tirelessly to give the world a healthy and truly sustainable source of sustenance that fully respects and cares for all life on earth. And so here in Rio, this, right here today, is where lies the true spirit of the "Summit"!

Thank you, and my warmest wishes for a deeply successful learning day. May you spread the knowledge acquired here today far and wide for the benefit of all life forms for which we the human beings have sacred responsibility of stewardship.

Thank you and TASHI DELEK!