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Keynote Address

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Redefining the Principles of Best Practice in Labour Administration in the New Age

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World's eminent HRD practitioners and scholars

Distinguished audience

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my most profound admiration and respect for what you all do for the humanity that brings me here. I am truly deeply honoured and blessed to be among you all – the galaxy of world's human resource luminaries. The aura of the most special relations between Bhutan and India makes my trip extra joyful and cherishing.

At the outset, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Hon'ble Chairman and everybody involved in organizing this Congress for most magnanimously giving me this wonderful opportunity to be part of this extraordinary event.

When I received the invitation letter from Dr. Jack Jones, I wrote back to him saying: *'Thank you for giving the humanity the hope'*. I really meant every word. The event *'World HRD Congress'* and its theme *'The Future of Work'* together gave me the understanding and warmth of the feeling of the presence of some extraordinary vision and compassion on the part of those people who envisioned this event.

I have been in charge of human resource, labour and employment matters in my country for nearly five years now. These are the issues that paramount important and a job that overarching that have the power to literally steer not only the direction of the country at large and also touch and enlighten the life of every citizen in particular.

However, as much as correct investment in these and the best management of these presents an infinite potential to propel the life of people to a virtuous realm of security, freedom, liberty, prosperity and happiness, misplaced priorities and bad management of these can send them tumbling into a vicious whirlpool of poverty, indignity, exploitation and misery.

Unfortunately, we have a huge number of people in the world in the latter category today. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates currently around 200 million people to be unemployed, of which around 75 million are youth in the age group of 15 to 24 years. Therefore, the theme of this Congress – **The Future of Work** – is indeed highly thoughtful, appropriate and visionary.

I feel that the issue of the future of work can be addressed really comprehensively and satisfactorily, and also that a nation can draw a real synergy in national performance, only by bringing at least the four major issues into discourse and knitting them into an action in a coherent, coordinated and calibrated manner. These are human resource development, employment, economy and labour administration.

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am fully aware that all the great minds in the universe on these matters have been here in Taj Lands End under one roof since a couple of days back. I really wished I were here earlier to listen to your discourses and availed myself the priceless opportunity to sip your vast experiences, knowledge and wisdom. But I simply could not make. Nonetheless, better late than never, indeed I am very happy to be here today at the culminating event of this year's Congress.

However, oddly on this occasion of the august assembly of the brightest and greatest minds, I am supposed to share my views on labour administration. I must admit I do not have any substantive credential to talk on this matter. The best and the only basis that I could draw some weak credential to speak on it is that at least this subject is very close to my heart. I developed love for it initially as a labour minister but now it has deepened in me personally more owing to the fact of one of my biggest passions being to strive to make a world of work that is characterized by full, gainful and enjoyable employment.

The specific topic that I have offered to share some views on today is on “**Redefining the Principles of Best Practice in Labour Administration in the New Age**”. I assure you that it is not going to be a full scale 45-minute academic lecture. Neither the concept is a divine new testament. It is more of a repackaged and a bit of redefined concept, and I intend to only briefly introduce this concept.

However, before I do that, let me first explain a bit why I felt it was necessary and important to do so – meaning to redefine the concept of labour administration. In this regard, I thought using the analogy of the description of the Buddha's teaching is most apt. It is said that Buddha's teaching is so vast that it is nearly impossible for a person to master them in one lifetime. This is the method of sutra system. However, in order to enable the followers to master them and achieve enlightenment in one lifetime, the succeeding masters had come up with another much more profound method of training and practice, which is called tantrayana system or yoga system.

Now, in trying to introduce the best labour administration system in my country, I have realized it to be a near impossible task to do so owing to a colossal effort needed to make to educate the whole population on all best aspects of labour administration system. Similar to Buddha's teaching, labour administration policies, systems and practices in the modern day world have become so complex and so very vast. So, I felt there was a need to come up with a capsular concept, which is profound yet simple and easily understandable to all and above all, one which is wholeheartedly embraceable to all – to employers, employees and governments alike. Further, as it benefits every citizen equally, the nation as a whole should be able to reap synergistic development, prosperity and happiness from it.

Based on my little knowledge of labour administration systems around the world - of different countries, of different economies and of different organizations, including that of International

Labour Organization (ILO), I have tried to redefine, or you may also say repackage, how labour administration could be perceived, understood and espoused. It is my own humble opinion that the proposed concept captures quite comprehensively the ideal best practices, and that it will remain relevant and stand the test of time of future economies for sometimes. I also would like to inform that I have tried to infuse in it the best tenets of universal human values and principles, and also some relevant elements from Bhutan's people-centred development philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

Ladies and gentlemen

This new concept is called 7L principles. These seven Ls are:

1. Life;
2. Livelihood;
3. Leisure;
4. Lenity;
5. Longevity;
6. Liberty; and
7. Life-long learning.

These principles are grounded on and anchored to the basic rational and question of '*what does a person needs in life to have a personally enriching, satisfying and fulfilling life and a professionally rewarding, enjoyable and successful career?*'. The basic point is whatever those elements be, that's exactly what the core purpose and mission of a labour administration system should be, and thereby, the system that captures these elements in the most holistic and inclusive way should be the best labour administration system. In my humble opinion, this is what 7L principles does quite well.

Let me briefly explain what each L stands for.

1. **Life** - this pertains to the whole gamut of occupational health, safety and welfare of a worker - an employee. Right to life and therefore, safety should no doubt be the most important of all to any person.
2. **Livelihood** - this pertains to the dimension of wages, salaries, pay, perks, allowances, bonuses and such other incentive policies and packages that not only provides a person adequate livelihood but also that is based on important principles such as '*equal pay for the work of equal value.*'.
3. **Leisure** - refers to rights of employees to standard working hours, rest period, different types of leave, right to holidays with pay, etc.
4. **Lenity** - pertains to a kind, caring, understanding and compassionate management and leadership. *A renowned corporate leader said that innovation and compassion will be the key to the success of leadership in the 21st century.* Employees should not be treated like machines and demand only productivity, outputs and performances. Employees are human beings who need physical

comforts as much as inner mental and spiritual nourishment; whose purpose in life is not only to make adequate livelihood but also pursue other more important and higher goals.

5. **Longevity** - this refers to a system that provides for old age social security such as pension, provident fund, gratuity and other post-retirement benefits including systems of guaranteed income supplement, allowances for a pensioner and his or her spouse and dependants.
6. **Liberty** - this pertains to the freedom of associations and unions that provides for systems, platforms and procedures for workers' representation and collective bargaining, which are key to the harmonious and productive working relationship between employees and employers.
7. **Life-long learning** - this pertains to the need for continuously up-skilling and re-skilling the knowledge, skills and values of employees, which should be mutually beneficial for the both a company's bottom-line and the higher pursuit of individual employees.

Ladies and gentlemen

This is what I yearn for and how I want the labour administration system to be redefined and redesigned. I believe this will be at least a better concept and a better way to practice, and one that can be universally relevant, meaningful and perhaps noble to pursue for the betterment of the humanity.

I am aware that extensive dialogues and discussions have taken place here in the last few days on multi-faceted aspects HR. You may have come up with some pathbreaking ideas and paradigms. If my proposition makes any sense, you are welcome to give a consideration to it. Of course, I honestly believe that the principles of HR Management cannot be too different from those of labour administration. In fact, I perceive, define and interpret them to be literally the same since the purposes and goals of both are the same. As such, it does not appear out of context to propose that the best practices in HRM can also be redefined, repacked and converged into and practiced in the form the same principles.

Bhutan's labour administration policy vision is to promote a productive, harmonious and happy working relationship between employers and employees. It excites me that this concept has the potential to facilitate pursuance of our labour administration and human resource development and management goals and aspirations in a more efficient and profound way. Our national constitution mandates the State to pursue promotion of full development of the human personality of every child, of every citizen as the foremost and ultimate vision of HRD. This 7L principle intends and espouses to do exactly that.

In concluding, I would like to once more say how fortunate and honoured I have been to be here with you all this evening at this extraordinary and historic event. In particular, on behalf of all the participants and on my own, I would like to profusely thank the chairman, emeritus chairman,

project director and all the distinguished members of different councils and committees and all the kind and hardworking men and women, in front and behind the scene for perfecting showcasing and bringing the Congress to a grand success.

Finally, on conferment of the most prestigious *Global Visionary Leadership Award* to me, I have no words to express my feelings. All I can say is that it is a great honour for me and I deeply value it. I pledge that I will at all times strive to live upto the privilege and honour bestowed upon me, and continue to unwaveringly work for the betterment of the humanity.

Thank you very much!

And thank you for your kind attention.