

**Statement by Mrs. Jayanthi Natrajan, Minister of State for Environment and Forests of India at the High Level Meeting on “Wellbeing and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm”, at UN Headquarters, New York, on April 02, 2012**

Hon’ble President of Costa Rica,  
Her Excellency Ms. Laura Chinchilla,

Hon’ble Prime Minister of Bhutan,  
His Excellency Mr.Jigmi Y. Thinley,

His Excellency Mr.Milos Koterec,  
President of the Economic and Social Council,

Madam Chairperson, Ms. Helen Clarke,  
Administrator, UNDP,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,



I am honored to be here to speak in this High level Meeting on “Wellbeing and Happiness”: Defining a New Economic Paradigm”. I have not come across a conference where happiness and economic wellbeing have been used in the same

sentence. In that sense this is indeed a historic conference and I am truly honored to be part of it.

We deeply commend the efforts of the Government of Bhutan and in particular the leadership of Prime Minister Thinley to bring the idea of Happiness into the larger discourse on sustainable development.

We were happy to co-sponsor the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on the subject last year, which has brought us all here today.

Our debate today is most timely.

We are just months away from the Rio Conference, where we would gather to chart a new future: a future free of want and hunger; a future where people live in harmony with nature, a future where social inclusion and development of all are nurtured and deeply valued.

**Mr. Prime Minister**, your country has been more than a friend to India. In our shared cultural ties, we have had much to learn from each other.

We were indeed honored that you came to Delhi last year to deliver the Prof. Hiren Mukherjee Memorial lecture in our Parliament on Gross National Happiness.

I assure you that your thoughts have given us valuable insights as to what we should do to make our abiding goal of “inclusive growth” as meaningful as you have done for your people.

We share your belief that human development should be based in equal measure on material progress, social inclusion, cultural life and living in harmony with nature.

I am deeply impressed by the words of President of Costa Rica who said that they have given up bullets for ballots. In my country, this reminds us of our own freedom struggle for Independence which was a bloodless revolution.

**Madam Chairperson,**

The symbiosis between human living and happiness is universal and eternal. Our religions, traditions and philosophies have all taught us to look for inner peace and happiness as the ultimate objective.

Ashoka, the great King of India, promoted peaceful existence based on social welfare, ecological responsibility, impartial justice and respect for all living beings.

But, the huge material progress that we have witnessed since the industrial revolution has cast tremendous pressure on planet Earth.

The inherent conflict is not between conservation and development, but between environment and the reckless exploitation of man and earth in the name of high living standards. As Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation said “Nature provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not every man’s greed.”

In an interdependent world, the answer to these pressing challenges lies in doing things together in a manner that is fair and equitable.

We all have a common responsibility but must accept that massive inequitable consumption of resources by some has created a deficit where there is hardly enough for those whose wants are yet to be met.

This demands that we also accept historical responsibility and agree that our responsibilities today must be differentiated. We must also respect the imperative for equity.

We have made significant progress but are still quite some distance away from achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including eradication of extreme poverty.

We are yet to wipe the tear from every hungry face. There are millions who still live without basic sanitation, health and clothing.

Progress and growth is essential to give these people a life of dignity and respect.

This needs to go hand in hand with ecological sustainability and the preservation of social inclusion.

**Madam Chairperson,**

We do, indeed, need to build a new economic paradigm that can help us achieve this. How else can we move towards sustainable development in an equitable manner unless economic growth, environmental protection and social sustainability nurture and preserve each other?

We must therefore re-evaluate the fundamentals on which our respective civic societies are based and the ideals by which they are sustained.

An ambitious order that seeks to achieve this must not only be harmonious but also inclusive. Such an order should both respect and create choices.

The problem for billions of people on this planet is lack of choices. The most effective guarantee for this is the integration of all three pillars of sustainable development on the basis of the Rio Principles.

Development process must be participatory in order to allow a full expression of these choices. The process should be inclusive not only at the national level but also at the global level.

We are aware of limitations of the GDP as a measure of economic well-being of the country. However, balancing of economic, social and environmental dimensions in an accounting system of GDP is a challenging notion. The weights attached to each dimension vary over time and space, and differ according to national needs and priorities. Moreover, human well being cannot be captured effectively by any single index.

We should be mindful that, in our quest for additional indicators to complement GDP, we must not move away from inclusive growth. We run the risk of delegitimizing our developmental model if this balance is not achieved.

In fact, an appropriate way is to look at sustainable consumption patterns. The moment is opportune to devise a paradigm for sustainable consumption that is anchored in the Rio Principles.

We need to build effective international partnerships to give effect to these goals.

We must also make global governance truly democratic. The rules of global engagement cannot and must not be the privilege of a few.

I would like to conclude with the words of our father of nation: “I am inviting those people who consider themselves as owners today to act as trustees, i.e. owners, not in their own right, but owners, in the right of those whom they have exploited. I will not dictate to them what commission to take, but ask them to take what is fair.” I can assure you that India will live up to its obligations and global responsibilities in such a fair, equitable and just paradigm.

If we are able to do so, we are well on our way to achieve a sustainable economic paradigm.

I wish happiness to all. Thank You.

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