

Launching of Târayâna Foundation
Welcome Speech

by Chhimmy Pem (General Secretary)

Your Royal Highness the Honourable Chief Guest, Your Majesty, Your Royal Highness, Venerable Dorji Lupon, Your Excellencies, Heads of Organisations, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Târayâna Foundation I have the privilege and honour of welcoming our very special chief guest His Royal Highness Dasha Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to the launch of Târayâna. Your Highness's presence amongst us today gives this occasion a special meaning. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Her Royal Highness and all our guests, who despite it being a Sunday afternoon, have found time to share this moment with us. Your presence here is very encouraging for the President and the members of the Târayâna Foundation as we launch this Foundation today.

Târayâna Foundation is the story of a 30 year old Wangmo of Laya - outcast by society – blind and pregnant.

It is the story of Tshering Pem of Nazhi – age of 16 and helpless with a fatherless child. A first division student who could not continue her studies.

It is about Wanghuck of Yuricholing in Trongsa, a father of 5 children – all of whom are blind.

It is about Wangmo of Phumzur – immobile and living a most undignified life surrounded by her excretion in a little shack. Lost in despair – not knowing day from night.

It is the story of the Lhops in southern Bhutan who live in a vicious debt cycle to some rich money lenders across the border – whose earnings are not enough to feed themselves and pay for the cost of uniforms and other expenses associated with sending children to school.

It is the story of many more such individuals and communities whose entire life's belongings put together are no bigger than our backpack for a week's journey and who live in dwellings that can hardly qualify for the word 'house'.

Her Majesty has personally provided lifelong security for many such individuals, giving them a sense of dignity in life. She has helped individuals start over their lives. Over the course of Her Majesty's travels this number has grown and is going to grow to an extent overwhelming for a single person's compassion - even if that person is a Queen. Through the Tarayana Foundation this compassionate gesture initiated by Her Majesty will reach a wider section of society.

Having had the privilege of travelling with Her Majesty on her tours to some of the most remote villages and settlements in Bhutan we have witnessed the frustration that she feels in not being able to do more for these individuals and communities. At night even after a hard day's journey she would keep us awake discussing the possibilities of helping the disadvantaged improve their quality of lives. Thus, the more she travelled the more resolved she became in establishing an organisation that will complement and supplement government initiatives of eradicating poverty. And so, after one such recent travel the Târâyâna Foundation was born.

Those of us who have had the privilege of travelling with Her Majesty on her tours throughout the length and breadth of this country are proud to report that developmental activities have reached almost every corner of Bhutan. Almost everywhere that Her Majesty and her co-travellers went there was a school, an ORC if not a BHU, and an agriculture extension office, within reach of most. But not everyone has been able to take advantage of the channels of development that the Royal Government of Bhutan has provided for them. There are some who still need that little push, an extra helping hand for them to reach where their fellow countrymen have reached. This is where Her Majesty would like the Tarayana Foundation to come in – to give that section of the society that extra assistance in ensuring that they become self reliant and self sufficient.

It is the hope and dream of the President and the members of Târayâna Foundation that with the blessings of Jetsun Dolma and the goodwill and support of everyone Târayâna Foundation will grow into an organisation that will one day not only reach out to vulnerable Bhutanese but also to the world at large.

Thank you