

OPEN LETTER TO DR. JOSEPH STIGLITZ AND DR. AMARTYA SEN Nobel laureates in Economy

Dear Dr. Sen and Dr. Stiglitz,

It is with excitement that we learn about your agreement to advise **French President Nicolas Sarkozy** on the way quality-of-life factors can be included in economic growth calculations. The initiative of President Sarkozy may grow towards a consorted effort challenging the accurateness of Gross Domestic Product to measure economic growth.

In November 2007 the **Third International Conference on Gross National Happiness** (GNH3) was held in Thailand, drawing a total of 893 participants to provincial capital Nongkhai, North-East Thailand, and to Bangkok, Chulalongkorn University.

Consensus of the GNH3 conference participants complies fully with the statement of President Sarkozy “we must change the way we measure growth” (AFP Press Release).

We strongly recommend to using your influence to broaden the initiative of the French President towards a global effort. We recommend to include visions, experiences and best practices from developing countries, in particular smaller and ‘least developed’ countries; as well as from NGO’s and community-based organizations, in the crucial exercise to redefine growth.

The term “Gross National Happiness” or GNH was coined by the 4th King of Bhutan in the 70’s as an alternative to GNP (or GDP) and now inspires a growing international movement reformulating the directions of “progress”. The 5th **King of Bhutan H.M. Jigme Khesar Wangchuk**, who recently succeeded his father, stated at the occasion of the First International Conference on Gross National Happiness in Thimpu, February 2004:

“I feel that there must be some convergence among nations on the idea of what the primary objective of development and progress should be – something Gross National Happiness seeks to bring about”.

The first International Conference on Gross National Happiness was organised in Thimphu, Bhutan, February 2004; the second in Nova Scotia, Canada, June 2005. Proceedings of the conferences have been published and media reports have been distributed widely.

In Bangkok outgoing **Prime Minister of Thailand Surayud Chulanont** stated in his Welcome Address to the GNH3 participants, 26 November 2007:

“An enormous challenge is to develop new ways to measure appropriately the success or failure of innovative policies. Using old standards for new policies will not help. I do hope that this Conference can help to advance our search for new approaches and indicators that will enhance contributions to sustainability. A cooperative framework for research should not only include Thailand and Bhutan, but also our colleagues within ASEAN and indeed from all regions of the world.”

Participants of the GNH3 conference included government policy makers and advisers, community leaders, Youth leaders, representatives of NGO’s, the business sector, academics and representatives of religions and spiritual streams.

Moderators and Speakers were **Sulak Sivaraksa**, social critic, Thailand; **Dr. Surin Pitsuwan**, Secretary General, ASEAN; **Dr. Sheldon Shaeffer**, Director of UNESCO Asia Pacific; **Jon Hall**, leader of the OECD Project ‘Measuring Progress of Societies’, France; **Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley**,

former Prime Minister of Bhutan; **Ringu Tulku Rinpoche**, Sikkim, India; **Nicholas Rosselini**, UNDP Resident Representative, Bhutan; **Sombath Somphone**, Magsaysay Award recipient, Laos, representing the Mekong River region; **Dr. Peter Hershock**, East West Center, Hawaii/USA; **Helena Norberg Hodge**, author *Ancient Futures* (on Ladakh) Sweden/Australia; **Dasho Karma Ura**, Director, Centre for Bhutan Studies; **Nic Marks**, New Economics Foundation, U.K.; **Dr. Darwis Khudori**, France/Indonesia, Director, Masters Degree in Trade with Asia, University of Le Havre; **Chou Jinyao**, SYNTAO, P.R. China; **Dr. Ronald Colman**, GPI (Genuine Progress Indicator) Atlantic, Canada; **Roger Torrenti**, Coordinator EuroAsia-ICT, France; **Dr. Amara Pongsapich**, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand; **Laurence J. Brahm**, Founder Shambala Foundation, USA/P.R. China/Tibet; **Aileen Kwa**, Heinrich Boell Foundation, Geneva; **Harn Yawnghwe**, Euro-Burma Office, Brussels, Belgium; **Prida Tiasuwan**, Pranda Group, Thailand; **Joyce Meuzelaar**, Social Venture Network Europe, the Netherlands; **Ms. Chea Vannath**, Peace Activist, Cambodia; and **Harsha Navaratne**, Sewalanka, Sri Lanka.

China expert and journalist **Laurence J. Brahm** formulated the search for a new standard as follows:

“So then what will be the future momentum of this new emerging Himalayan Consensus? Can it serve as a viable alternative to the once beheld *Washington Consensus*?”

The specific contribution of Gross National Happiness towards the redefinition of growth could be that, in addition to equitable economic development, environmental care and good governance, GNH emphasizes cultural promotion as a fourth ‘pillar’ of progress.

Spiritual leaders from all faiths came together for the invocation of the GNH3 conference in Wat Hin Mak Peng, Nongkhai, a Buddhist temple in the forest tradition.

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche concluded: “Ultimate Wellbeing is Happiness. Happiness is Peace”.

Prime Minister Surayud put it this way:

“The point is that we have to really dig deep into our traditions – into our local wisdom and fundamental beliefs – and question ourselves to arrive at a genuine understanding of what happiness is and how we can achieve it, collectively and individually.”

Critical multi-stakeholder exchanges between all continents are essential in order to settle a new standard for genuine progress, taking local diversity into account.

The organizers of the Third International Conference on Gross National Happiness propose global, regional, national and local dialogue and offer their goodwill and expertise towards open, free partnerships.

Bangkok, 15 January 2008.

Major GNH3 partners were: Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation, Thailand
Ministry for Social Development and Human Security, Thailand
Centre for Bhutan Studies, Bhutan

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