**Her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck, President of YDF**

**Speech at the closing Ceremony of Golden Youth Award Camp 2015**

**10th July 2015**

The Golden Youth Award was initiated in 2005 to mark the 50th Birth Anniversary of His Majesty the 4th King Jigme Singye Wangchuck who always put the children and youth of Bhutan at the forefront of all government policies. 10 years later we dedicate this event in a humble way to say thank you to his majesty our beloved King for his immeasurable love and concern for the youth of Bhutan. Our Kings have placed great faith in you, our youth, so you must remember that you play an important role in developing the future of our country.

Our Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck said, “I want you to know that as a King, my passion will always be to nurture our youth, day after day, year after year – for it is their skills, their labor and commitment to the country that will build our future. There is no other path, no other tool, for Bhutan’s future success”.

Opportunities such as the Golden Youth Award, opens doors to make this challenging path lead you to success and I assure you with the right attitude and hard work, you will not fail.

Today, we commemorate the 8th Golden Youth Award to our 4th Druk Gyalpo as we join the nation to celebrate His Majesty’s 60th birth Anniversary. We have chosen this special occasion to introduce a new feature to this camp, a program to promote service. The proposals that you submitted have been assessed and the best two will be implemented. The proposals selected are: a school park in Nanglam & a program on hygiene in Chukha. Jigme Dema & Lhawang Dorji will lead the implementation of the programs in their dzongkhags.

Congratulations! I know you have it in you to carry this proposal forward and your vision of helping your community can now become a reality. I must thank UNICEF for making this possible.

I am happy to be among dynamic young boys and girls from all over the country. Together we can offer our prayers for His Majesty the 4th King’s long life and honor our King who has always placed much importance on youth. Under His Majesty’s command, YDF was established to ensure that we would always have our own resources to sustain youth development efforts. Over the years, YDF has worked to build our human capital, providing scholarships, skills training, leadership building and services for youth with special needs- disabled, the poor, youth in conflict with the law and those abusing drugs and alcohol.

Today we face many issues effecting the youth of our country. Drug and alcohol abuse is one of them. I have encouraged YDF to use its resources to combat drug and alcohol abuse as I have seen families go through go through so much pain when their children succumb to the use of drugs. Recently, we launched the Campaign Against Drugs to optimize our efforts and resources through more strategic networks and activities. I call upon each and everyone present here today to be our ambassadors and carry forth our message to your communities. BNCA and the YDF Drug unit will give you all the information you need to make your participation in our campaign a success. The issue of suicide has unfortunately become a growing concern. Just a few days ago, the government released its report on suicide in Bhutan. At the rate of 10 per 100,000, we are not far behind the global average of 11.4 per 100,000, looking at our small population this is alarming.

* suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people
* depression and substance abuse are associated with more than 90% of suicides, and
* 2 out of 3 people with depression never seek help

The stigma surrounding suicide can discourage people from talking about suicidal thoughts. Being afraid and ashamed to talk about it may deter them from seeking the treatment they need. It is a mental illness and it is treatable. It is heartening to know that the government through the national Suicide Prevention Program has developed a three-year action plan to prevent suicides in the country. We pray and hope this will have a positive effect. Prevention of suicide must be a joint effort. We need to work together.

Bhutan is going through rapid change: economically, socially, and culturally. You are the most vulnerable. You have to work hard to better yourself, grab opportunities to grow intellectually, emotionally and physically in a positive way. Academic results are important but what is equally important is to inculcate the right attitude, the ability to turn failure into opportunities, the perseverance to work hard consistently and above all, the value of integrity.

Many of you worry about finding gainful employment in the future. It is true that one of the biggest challenges we face is unemployment among youth, which is 9.4%. The government is doing whatever it can to address the problem but you must also develop a sense of appreciation for jobs that require specific aptitudes and skills. Having dignity of labor and passion are two very important qualities to achieving success. I know of a man who is educated and chose to open a barbershop. He now earns a minimum of Nu. 2,000 a day and in a month approximately Nu. 60,000. A lady from Punakha earns Nu. 200,000 a year just from selling chilies besides earning from fruits and vegetables. They are passionate about their work and find joy in doing it even though they are not sitting behind an office desk. You must not only look at white - collar jobs, you have to look at you aptitude and interest and pursue it. If you sow the seeds of hard work, determination and endurance, you can reap the rewards of achievement, success and fulfillment.

You, the youth, are our wealth, our present and our future. You are the protectors of our culture and traditions, which for so long have given us our unique identity. Our culture and traditions are based on simple yet fundamental human values that we Bhutanese have inherited through many successive generations. Values of peace, respect for our elders, parents and teachers, integrity, and above all loyalty to our country and Kings.

Our previous Golden Youth Award winners are doing very well, they are able to stand proudly beside achievers from other parts of the world in distinguished universities. Many of them were from remote schools and for some of them the scholarships offered their first glimpse of the world beyond Bhutan. The first Golden Youth Award winner Dawa Gyeltshen from Samtse is currently studying at St.Francis Xavier University in Canada, the 2009 winner Thinlay Dorji from Thimphu is pursuing MBBS in Sri Lanka, the 2010 winner Sangay Tempa from Pemagatshel is studying at the University of Oklahoma in the US, the 2011 winner Kunzang Om from Thimphu is studying in Whitman College in the US, and the 2012 winner Sherab Dorji from Wangduephodrang will be going to Brown University in the US. Their commitment and hard work has paid off. We are proud of them.

I would like to congratulate each one of you for successfully representing your schools and Dzongkhags at this camp, especially the winners. All of you have shown outstanding qualities and we are proud of your achievements.

We owe the success of this camp to you the participants, our escort teachers, our dedicated Y-VIA students, YDF staff, and our sponsors – UNICEF, Dr. Atti-la, DHI, DGPC, BDBL, BPC, and BOB. I am grateful for the support that you have always provided us.

I wish you all Tashi Delek & Thank You.