



20 March 2014. A profound shift of how we perceive happiness is underway all around the world. Too often happiness has been associated with wealth, consuming products, following trends or economic growth. However, our way of defining happiness is drifting away from simple material and monetary limitations. People are now recognising that 'progress' should be about increasing human happiness and wellbeing, not just growing the economy at all costs.

In his [message](#) for the 2014 International Day of Happiness Secretary General Ban Ki-moon explores this concept by identifying three indivisible principle pillars defining gross global happiness: social, economic and environmental well-being. Happiness, says the Secretary General, “is neither a frivolity nor a luxury. It is a deep-seated yearning shared by all members of the human family.”

Bhutan brings this progressive view to life through its Gross National Happiness (GNH) index. Traditional economic views such as GDP look only at how much an economy has grown, removing the human element from the development equation. The GNH is a way of placing humanity in the center of development by asking the question, “how happy does this make us?” This ensures that development truly advances the human condition, rather than simply increasing profits.

The United Nations is also placing the human element to the forefront of global development, not only through economic growth, but also through ensuring an increase in the quality of life for people around the world. The United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) compiles an annual report called the Human Development Index (

HDI

) measuring development by combining indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income into a composite index. This thorough report identifies critical areas where resources need to be diverted to ensure human development.

So why do we celebrate this on 20 March? Shouldn't we be happy every single day? Of course we should, but there's a particular reason the UN celebrates happiness on this day. Each year, on this date, a universal phenomenon occurs. The sun is on the same plane as the earth's equator so that day and night are of equal length, creating balance in the earth's celestial coordinate systems.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expresses the spirit of the Day, and challenges the international community to continue working together, with his remark in this year's Message for International Day of Happiness that, "Happiness may have different meanings for different people. But we can all agree that it means working to end conflict, poverty and other unfortunate conditions in which so many of our fellow human beings live."