

## United Nations Day 2010 24 October

Honourable Chief Guest

HE Dr Dipu Moni, MP, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh

Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud, the former Advisor to the Care-Taker Government

Mr Arthur Erkin, the UN Resident Coordinator

Heads of UN Agencies, Distinguished Secretaries, Excellencies

Dear UN Colleagues, Distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon to all of you

On behalf of the UN System in Bangladesh I would like to register my deep gratitude to HE the Foreign Minister for giving us time today.

Bangladesh was admitted into the membership of the United Nations on 17 September 1974, after two-and-half years of its victory over the occupation forces in 1971. Once being vetoed by a Permanent Member of the Security Council on 25 August 1972, Bangladesh became the 136th Member country through a unanimously adopted resolution.

In just over a week of its admission to the UN, on 25 September 1974, the then Prime Minister Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressing the UN General Assembly said, “No greater challenge has been faced by the UN than that of marshalling the force of reason to bring about a just international economic order.”

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign nation in 1971 through decades of massive nationalist and sustained democratic struggle that culminated in the nine-month long War of Liberation fought by all sections of society under the leadership of Bangladesh Awami League. The war of liberation started on 26 March 1971 when the Pakistani ruling elites thwarted the democratic electoral process by reversing Bangalis gains of the ballots through bullets. The independence of Bangladesh was achieved at the cost of three million lives and ten million displaced persons that took asylum in neighbouring India. Till today that 10 million refugees remain to be the largest and most rapid forced displacement in the history of mankind. UNHCR came forward to provide them support and facilitate their repatriation to Bangladesh.

Though Bangladesh formally hoisted its flag at the UN in 1974, the cooperation between Bangladesh and the world organization dated back to the formative years of its independence. For instance, Bangladesh became a member of WHO, ILO, IBRD and GATT in 1972 and FAO and ICAO in 1973. The UN arranged a charter plane to bring back the stranded Bangalis from Pakistan in July 1973. To support the rebuilding efforts of the new nation, the approach to Chalna Port, which was devastated during the war, was cleared of the sunken vessels with the assistance of the United Nations.

**UNICEF** was the first to sign an 8.5 million dollar assistance agreement, on 28 June 1973, with the Bangladesh government to finance education and rehabilitation projects in the war-ravaged country. Since then it has been assisting the government in the fields of health and nutrition, education, water and sanitation and hygiene, child protection and promoting children’s rights.

For more than three-and-half decades **UNDP** has been partnering with Bangladesh, from nation building to human development. On 11 June 1974, a \$30 million programme was approved for financing development programmes of Bangladesh for 1974-1975. In 2009, UNDP delivered over \$74 million to support national development plans in democratic governance, poverty reduction, disaster management, sustainable environment and climate change.

**WFP's** support to Bangladesh dates back to 1974. It helps the government in reducing poverty through addressing the challenges of food insecurity and malnutrition. Since 1974, it has distributed 14.6 million tons of food grains- assisting 50 million beneficiaries, providing nutrition support to 29,000 expectant mothers, 17,000 adolescent girls and 97,000 distressed children. WFP's 2010 programme is valued at \$76 million which targets more than five million beneficiaries.

**UNFPA** has been working in close partnership with the government of Bangladesh since 1974 through technical advisory services and financial support in the areas of health, family planning and population planning. It has so far completed six country programme cycles, and is currently carrying out its seventh country programme. Starting with an allocation of \$10 million, the current programme is worth \$40.5 million. The main thrusts of its current programme rests on the national priorities in reproductive health and family planning and gender equality and the empowerment of women, with a particular emphasis on gender-based violence.

On 12 November 1973, Bangladesh became a Member of **FAO** and since then this specialized agency of the UN has been working with the government in the fields of policy advice, capacity building, technical support to gain modern technologies, facing pandemics and animal diseases as well as supporting the poorest by providing technologies and training. With the assistance of FAO, Bangladesh attained self-sufficiency in food in the year 2000, by producing 25 million tons of food grains. FAO's current portfolio contribution to Bangladesh is about \$55 million dollars.

**ILO** opened up its office in Bangladesh in 1973 to help the government and other stakeholders to promote decent work. Its key contributions include skill training and entrepreneurship, green jobs, combating child labour, increase social protection and rights of the workers, and promote gender equality at work place. It is heartening to note that Bangladesh has ratified most of the ILO conventions including the one on Worst Forms of Child Labour.

Soon after the independence of Bangladesh, a "Basic Agreement" was signed on 29 June 1972 for **WHO** to provide technical advisory assistance on a continuing and long-term basis. Since then, increasing attention was given on health promotion and prevention aspects. WHO supports the government in the development of national health-related policies and strategies, conducting training for skill development of health personnel and providing health needs after natural calamities.

**UNESCO** set up its office in 1995 to work in the areas of education, culture, communication information and social science. While the major efforts are directed to achieving Education for All goals, UNESCO's contributions to culture of Bangladesh is well appreciated. The Proclamation of Baul Songs as intangible cultural heritage of humanity, Declaration of World Heritage Sites of historic Mosque of Bagerhat, the Buddhist Vihara at Pharpur and the Sundarbans -- are of great importance.

Having established its Regional Office for South Asia in Bangladesh in 1998, significant contributions are being made by the International Organization for Migration (**IOM**) in the fields of labour migration, counter trafficking, border management, migration health, emergencies and refugees resettlement.

**UNAIDS** established in 1996 and **UNIFEM** set up more recently are two important programmes who are also actively working in the fields of HIV/AIDS and improving the conditions of women in Bangladesh.

UN support for free and fair national elections in 1996, 2001 and 2008 bear testimony of its commitment to development and democracy in Bangladesh. Visits by Secretaries-General since 1971 -- Kurt Waldheim in 1973, Perez de Cueller in 1986, Kofi Annan in 2001 and Ban Ki-moon in 2008 are all examples of existing warm relationships.

UN system has one of its largest presence in Bangladesh at the moment, with more than \$250 million worth annually. Under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) they are all working to support the government's developmental efforts in line with the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

While the world is reeling under climate change and four Fs -- food, fuel, flu and finance -- the world community still looks to the United Nations to help defeat poverty and hunger, to be the defender of the defenseless.

United Nations commitment to “save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and to create an environment for “Better life in larger freedom” is impossible without the active support of its Member States.

In this connection I would like to share with you a Chinese story:

Once upon a time there was a wise women who used to know answers of all questions. One day a smart young man came to her with a tiny bird in his clasps and asked, “wise lady, can you tell me whether the tiny bird inside my hands is dead or alive?” The wise lady thought, if she said the bird is alive then the young man will push his hands tight and kill it; if she said it is dead, then he would release the bird to fly away. In such a circumstance she thought for a while and answered, my dear young boy -- the answer to your question lies in your hands.

Ladies and gentlemen, the success or failure of the United Nations, therefore, lies in the hands of its Member States.

The achievement of the MDG Award for Bangladesh at the 65th session of UNGA, where the Honourable Foreign Minister was also present, is in fact a step forward towards a peaceful democratic world - free from poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and malnutrition.

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity today.

Kazi Ali Reza  
Officer-in-Charge  
UNIC Dhaka