



MEDIA RELEASE

ATTENTION: NEWS EDITOR / CHIEF REPORTER

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Statement to the Media in Bangladesh

Mr. Kemal Derviş, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Dhaka: Thank you all for coming as I end my three-day visit to Bangladesh. I came here to listen and learn about how the country is moving forward in its democratic process, how it is facing the global economic situation, and to see the work of the UN system and UNDP. I had extremely informative meetings with the Honourable President, the Finance Advisor of the Caretaker Government, the Chief of the Army Staff, the Chief Election Commissioner, various civil society leaders, and business leaders.

I am proud of the long history and partnership that the United Nations has with Bangladesh, a country that gives so generously towards UN peacekeeping and has made so many other significant contributions. It is a valued member of the UNDP Executive Board. It is respected for initiating the annual UN General Assembly resolution on a culture of peace, and for being a founding member of both the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council.

Today, Bangladesh stands at an important moment in its history. It is determined to build stronger democratic institutions and deeper practices of democracy. At the same time, it is facing important challenges, such as rebuilding after the devastating floods and cyclone Sidr and responding to global price shocks.

I had an opportunity to see with my own eyes the resilience of the people of Bangladesh in the face of economic hardship. Yesterday, I visited an urban poverty reduction project in Barisal where communities are establishing enterprises and improving local infrastructure, such as clean water sources and sanitation facilities. This is a powerful example of the good that can happen when there is a strong partnership between the urban poor and local government, with support from UNDP, UN Habitat and DFID.

I also had the opportunity to visit a voter registration site in Jhalakati District. It was an inspiring scene: citizens lining up at the registration centre to have their photographs taken, their fingerprints scanned, and their names registered, to become part of the electorate that will decide the future political orientation of this country.

The voters list is expected to be the most accurate list the country has ever had, and the undertaking is impressive by all international standards. If I am not mistaken, by the end of registration of about 80 million people, Bangladesh will have electronically registered the largest number of voters in the shortest period of time, ever, in any country. I would like to convey my heartiest congratulation to the Government of Bangladesh for this accomplishment.

I am also proud that UNDP has played a role. Together with eight other development partners, UNDP came forward with a pool of contributions worth 50 million US dollars for the project. UNDP has also helped the Election Commission with procuring laptops, finger print scanners, and by providing electoral expertise.



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The electoral registration that I witnessed yesterday is part of a larger agenda of transitioning back to democracy. The Caretaker Government is carrying out governance reform on many fronts: anti-corruption, judicial reform, public administration reform, law enforcement reform, and regulatory reform, just to name a few. These are all important steps to creating the checks and balances necessary to make government more transparent and more responsive to the needs of average citizens.

“Winner takes all” systems often exclude large portions of legitimate participants in the democratic process, which can lead to unsustainable tensions. It is important to ensure that meaningful political space be created for both the elected majority and opposition parties to play their respective roles productively after elections.

What I have seen here and learnt about this country tells me that democracy belongs in Bangladesh. This is people with a strong love for democracy, a passion for independence, and need for forthright discussion and exchange of views.

A peaceful, successful and democratic Bangladesh is important to the people who live here, but is also important to the whole world. A Bangladesh that overcomes its current economic challenges and successfully makes its democratic transition is a powerful example to many other countries confronting similar problems.

Since I arrived here, I also had discussions with leading economists of this country. We talked about the international commodity price shocks and what they mean here in Bangladesh. As you know, prices are hurting many countries around the globe not only here in Bangladesh. The real issue is protecting the vulnerable from these shocks. The international community cannot leave these huge world events unattended.

For an export-oriented economy like Bangladesh, what happens in the world economy is vitally important. The world economy is at a crossroads. It is too early to tell whether the upheavals over the last few months signal a recession or merely a slowing-down. To what extent the emergent economies of Asia -- in particular China and India -- will function as cushions is also something that is debated. What is clear, however, is that the world market will provide both opportunities and new challenges for Bangladesh.

This is an extraordinarily important chapter in the history of Bangladesh. The country is facing important decisions, on how to further economic growth in a difficult global economic environment, and how to make sure that democracy deepens and endures. I am impressed by the sincerity and commitment of the Government to make this happen. I look forward to all actors, especially political parties, coming forward to play their vital role constructively. And I have confidence that their decisions on these important issues will be inspired by the best of Bangladesh’s history, and that they will be decisions that display courage, wisdom, and resourcefulness.

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For further information please contact: Mr. A M Sakil Faizullah, Communications Manager, UNDP via email: sakil.faizullah@undp.org, ph: 811 8600, ext. 2417, mob: 01713 049900