



BANGLADESH

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Statement by
H.E. Ms. Ismat Jahan
Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations
at the forty-seventh Session of the Commission for Social Development on

Priority theme 3 (a): 'Social integration'

New York, 5 February 2009

Madam Chair,

I join the previous speakers in congratulating you and the Bureau upon your election. I am confident that under your able stewardship our deliberations will lead to a successful conclusion. Bangladesh associates itself with the statement of Sudan made on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Madam Chair,

The Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) had rightfully brought to the fore the importance of social integration in achieving global development goals. It also provided a framework for developing and implementing socially inclusive policies. Bangladesh remains fully committed to making progress in all spheres of social development in line with the Copenhagen objectives and the MDGs. We agree with the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report on social integration and call for their due implementation.

We nonetheless, share the concern expressed in the Secretary-General's report that despite the pronounced commitments to internationally agreed development goals, the promise of taking action towards social integration remains largely unfulfilled. It is also disconcerting to note, as the 2005 review of WSSD reveals, not only has globalization led to greater exclusion but the social integration component of development strategies has largely remained ignored. Securing the rights of migrant workers remains to be addressed properly. Women's full emancipation is still a far cry. Rapid and unplanned urbanization has led to homelessness causing further social exclusion of the urban poor. Progress towards the goal of decent work remains somewhat elusive.

Madam Chair,

Let me now refer to our experience at the national level. The Constitution of Bangladesh has special provisions for vulnerable sections of the population with a view to promoting social and economic integration and greater harmony in the society. The key development challenge that we face is achieving sufficient economic growth in order to secure full and effective inclusion of the marginalized segment of population in the country's development process.

Our national social welfare policy, 2006 has been formulated in line of our constitutional commitments and MDGs, as well as to complement our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The main goal of the policy is to turn Bangladesh into a welfare state. Accordingly, we have taken up pro-poor, multi-dimensional and intensive programmes for all social groups as well as the disadvantaged segment of the population. The aim is to offset their inadequacies and ensure their access to opportunities and participation in the decision-making process. The main thrust of our social development policy is "people-centred". The basic approach is to put the "people" in charge as active agents of the development process rather than simple passive beneficiaries.

Poverty eradication and empowerment of women constitute an integral part of our social development planning. Access to micro-credit and non-formal education has paved the way for economic, political and social empowerment of our women by fostering their entrepreneurship and employability. Empowerment of women is crucial in ensuring greater integration of women not only in society but in the national economy at large.

Our latest poverty reduction strategy paper pursues the goal of accelerated poverty reduction along with the goals of full employment and decent work. Many of the goals set in the context of the decent work objectives are already contained in our development plans. Bangladesh Decent Work Country Programme integrates relevant labour and social issues to subserve the economic and social imperatives simultaneously. The growing emphasis on decent work with a focus on social dialogue and social protection offers better prospects for social integration.

Kinship, social and familial ties and values are hallmarks of Bangladesh society. The society is also traditionally known for its secularism, openness, tolerance and respect for diversity. As a result, minorities and other distinct ethnic groups have become integral part of our mainstream culture without surrendering their religious and cultural distinctions and identities.

Social inclusion, social cohesion and social justice are integral part of lasting peace. All these must be addressed in a comprehensive way as envisaged in the broad social integration paradigm by the WSSD.

Madam Chair,

While national efforts are crucial, governments, acting alone, cannot guarantee effective social inclusion for the population. The NGOs, the private sector and the civil society at large have important role to play. Similarly, national efforts may often need to be buttressed by necessary international cooperation and partnership. There is also a need to set concrete benchmarks and a monitoring mechanism to assess and follow up on national progress.

In closing, Madam Chair, let me underscore that the impact of current global crises on the poor and socially disadvantaged groups compounds the problems of poverty and social exclusion even more. The recent financial crisis further established that economic development is untenable if not complemented by appropriate level of social development. It is an inclusive society where sustainable development can thrive. We need to formulate more 'socially responsible' macro-economic policies to further our development goals. I hope our deliberations in this forum would suitably guide us to this end.

I thank you.