

Remarks for Janina Jaruzelski, LCG Co-Chair and USAID Mission Director Bangladesh Development Forum 2015 Opening Plenary

- Her excellency, Honorable Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina;
- Honorable Minister of Finance, Abul Maal Muhith;
- Honorable Senior Secretary for ERD & Co-Chair of the LCG, Mohammad Mejbahuddin;
- Kingo Toyoda, from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Wencai Zhang, Vice President of the ADB;
- Jin Liqun, President-designate of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank;
- Esteemed colleagues, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen:

Assalamu aleikum, nomoshkar, and good morning.

On behalf of all the Local Consultative Group Development Partners, it is an honor and a pleasure to be here today. We at the LCG are proud to be among the world's most active donor communities and very proud of the long-standing strong partnership with the Government and people of Bangladesh. Over the next two days, we look forward to discussing the exceptional progress Bangladesh has made in many key development sectors and what we can do to build on this progress to ensure that growth is inclusive and leaves no one behind.

It is no secret that Bangladesh has made outstanding progress on key Millennium Development Goals and we are confident that similar progress is possible under the new Sustainable Development Goals adopted in September. Many years of sustained 6 percent annual growth have already pushed Bangladesh across the World Bank's Lower Middle Income threshold. With the right choices, the Prime Minister's goal of attaining full Middle Income Status by 2021, the 50th anniversary of independence, is achievable.

Sustaining high economic growth will require Bangladesh to do more to encourage investments, especially in infrastructure and renewable energy. Perhaps even more important is preparing young people for a rapidly evolving world economy by equipping them with the sort of quality education and analytical reasoning skills that will enable them to adapt and excel.

To consolidate Middle Income Status, Bangladesh will need to focus greater attention on modernizing its institutions of governance and maintaining ample space for informed policy debate. It will be important to preserve the successes of Bangladesh's historically vibrant civil society and lively

media. It will also be important to avoid undermining success in the governance sphere via well-intentioned but counterproductive laws.

Bangladesh has the skills to accelerate its already very impressive achievements in moving millions out of extreme poverty. Vigorous implementation of the new National Social Security Strategy should, in our view, be a top priority. The approach of pursuing fewer, but larger, better targeted, and more efficient government programs is one that we view as most promising.

Bangladesh has doubled—nearly tripled—its rice production and significantly improved its nutritional statistics. Still, under-nutrition and stunting remain formidable challenges and cost an estimated \$1 billion in lost productivity every year, with even higher costs in terms of healthcare. Improving nutrition is one of the most cost-effective investments Bangladesh could make and we hope that the Honorable Prime Minister's Office can lead in advancing this agenda.

Enhancing the participation of women and girls in all aspects of society is a theme we will raise again and again over the next few days as one of the most important keys to accelerating Bangladesh's development. Bangladeshi women have made enormous strides over the last four decades, in terms of political empowerment, better job opportunities, and greater access to education. Still, more remains to be done to enable women and girls to achieve their full potential. We urge greater attention to preventing gender-based violence, and urge the Government to deliver on the commitments made at the Girls Summit regarding child marriage.

Bangladesh's success in reducing maternal and infant mortality has been one of its most outstanding achievements. At the same time, there is room to improve the quality of healthcare and to increase funding for both healthcare and education, which as a percentage of national budget, remain relatively low compared to global norms. We look forward to continuing our close collaboration to enhance quality, inclusiveness, and efficiency in the health and education systems.

And finally, every person in Bangladesh is acutely aware of the risks of climate change and natural disasters. Bangladesh is, unfortunately, Number 1 on the 2014 Climate Vulnerability Index. We applaud the huge progress the Government has made in successfully preparing for cyclones and floods, and encourage further progress on a whole-of-government approach to emergency preparedness, particularly in urban areas. We also stress protection of the Sundarbans as an essential natural barrier that shields Bangladesh from cyclones, flooding, and other climate shocks.

We will be expanding on these and other points, such as urbanization, the needs of youth, public financial reform, migration, and more over the course of the forum. We look forward to hearing the Government's views on these important issues and, on behalf of the Development Partners, I want to once again thank the Government of Bangladesh for organizing this important event. We see it as a

valuable platform for dialogue and a way to further strengthen our partnership. We look forward to working with all of you to further realize the dream of Sonar Bangla, where all women and men across the country have the greatest possible opportunity to learn, to live healthy and productive lives, and to truly prosper.

Thank you very much. Onek dhonnobad.