Bangladesh

“Peace is the Foundation for Achieving UN Millennium Development Goals”
Statement by Bangladesh Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Dr AK Abdul Momen at the World Peace Youth Festival Conference in Berlin, August 26-27, 2011

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking the organizers of the World Peace Youth Festival Conference for organizing this important event at a time when we are heading to complete our tenure of measuring MDGs in 2015, at a time when one after another global financial crises and stock market debacles and nearly stagnant growth rates in many important countries are eroding the confidence of the global people and many are shying off of their responsibility not knowing what should be the appropriate model of development leading to sustainable peace. I thank the World Peace Partnership for taking a lead in organizing this event that is being participated by so many stakeholders; government representatives, business leaders, civic society, non-government organizations, Nobel Laureates, opinion leaders, and media partners and no wonder, it will inspire and empower millions of people across nations to take positive action to achieve sustainable peace and stability. I am hopeful that it would provide renewed momentum to prevent countries from relapsing into conflict after peace has established. Too many people are currently living in post-conflict countries under abject poverty.

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Peacebuilding are inherently intertwined. Any attempt of exclusivity is likely to yield breeding ground for future conflicts. It is well known that the conflict has devastating impact on achieving MDGs, likewise, lack of progress towards achieving MDGs has also destructive impact on peace-building process. While a hungry man is typically an angry man, a hungry man cannot feed himself without ensuring security for his food delivery. It is therefore, of utmost importance to ensure delivery of tools to achieving
MDGs which should be concomitant with adequate support services of security. Here comes the equilibrium approach to peacebuilding by addressing both development activities through MDGs and political activities including ensuring resource mobilization both public and private, security, human rights and people’s participation.

There is evidence that lack of development activities such as MDGs would give incentive to potential parties to involve into conflict. Here, the issue of motivational factors needs to be considered appropriately. What each motivated actor shares as noted by Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, however, is a political environment in which success in achieving peace depends on the degree of harm sustained, the resources available for development, and international assistance to overcome the gaps. Low level of economic development i.e. lack of progress in achieving MDGs, poverty reduction or job creation and other deficiencies in achieving goals may motivate actors to violence, due to the low opportunity cost of conflict and also due to the opportunities for private gains. If young youth cannot find commensurate jobs or if they lose all their hopes and dreams, probability of indulging in conflict or war is much higher.

Achieving MDGs could be a people centric approach. Its ultimate stakeholders are grass root people who are often misinformed about their potential of peaceful life. MDGs such as MDG-1, Ending Poverty and Hunger, MDG-2, Universal Education, MDG-3, Gender Parity, MDG-4, Infant Mortality, MDG-5, Maternal Mortality, MDG-6, Combat HIV/AIDS, and MDG-7, Environmental Sustainability--- all entail involvement of common people. Success in achieving MDG goals will reduce joblessness, more importantly, hopelessness and would provide a decent living that will deter conflicts, empower people, improve health, ensure better education, greater participation in nation building efforts, ensure inclusive democracy and improve better private business and investment opportunities. However, development needs to be addressed holistically as Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina visualized in her ‘people-centric development model for sustainable peace’, in her ‘vision 2021‘ that is achievable through the correct and effective use of ICT technology or ‘Digital Bangladesh’.

**Sheikh Hasina’s thoughts on Peace**

Her thoughts on peace is wide ranging, covering from improving the life and livelihood of street children in the remotest and hard-to-reach areas of Bangladesh, to global issues pertaining to terrorism, food security, human rights, and climate change. Her thoughts on global peace are evident in her national actions, in her deliberations, and in her political foresight.
Sheikh Hasina’s peace-model is multidimensional beyond MDGs and encompasses many new areas, those which were previously least explored. She is a true proponent of people’s empowerment through peace-centric development. She introduced ‘Union Information Service Centers’ in all areas of the country with a view to reduce corruption, provide uninterrupted service to all citizens in areas of healthcare, agriculture, industry, social safety network, job availability, education, personal and community security, and encouragement of public participation in nation building efforts. Notable features of Sheikh Hasina’s people’s empowerment through peace-centric development model are as follows:

- Peace is a holistic and integrated concept.
- Peace is integral to humane development.
- Peace and democracy are inextricably linked; democracy is a basic precondition for peace.
- Global Peace is the sum total of local and regional peace.
- Peace is impossible without removal of all *barriers to freedom*.
- Peace is impossible without poverty eradication as well as without drastic reduction of inequality in a world of opulence and abundance.
- Peace is impossible without establishment and institution of human rights, Constitutional rights, and judicial rights.
- Peace is impossible without full empowerment of women involving economic empowerment, political empowerment, and social empowerment.
- Peace is impossible without creating a ‘fear-less society’.
- Peace is impossible in absence of a secular mindset among the people.
- Peace is impossible without a caring environment and a process in which rights of all marginalized people are materialized.
- Peace is impossible without transparency in governance and the Government’s accountability to its citizens.
· Peace is impossible without total respect to rule of law.

· Peace is not possible without creation of job opportunities for all.

Sheikh Hasina’s thoughts on global peace rests upon her strong philosophical beliefs that, “all men and women should be treated as being morally and ethically equal”, “human capabilities are unlimited”, and “unlimited human capabilities can only be realized through peace”. Therefore, throughout her life, Sheikh Hasina made uncompromising efforts towards transforming these “impossibilities” into the “possibilities”. In this process, as a peace-builder, in spite of myriad constraints, she did her best as a prime minister, as a leader of the Opposition, as President of her political party, and as a citizen to achieve MDG goals.

Sustainable development can lead to peace and it is the lifeline of democracy. Sustainable development includes many issues, for example, eradication of poverty, inclusion of marginalized people, empowerment of women, alleviation of inequality; accelerating humane development, mitigation of deprivation, unfairness and grievances, and fighting terrorism. Many of which are part of MDG goals. But none of these can be truly achieved without people’s empowerment, which is not possible to attain again without people’s leadership.

Good news is, in spite of resource constraints, repeated calamities, high density of population, relatively less efficient infrastructure, large-scale abject poverty and high illiteracy, Bangladesh either achieved or on tract in most of the MDG goals. It achieved 99% primary school enrolment or MDG-2. It achieved MDG-3, gender parity: it’s ratio of male and female students in primary and secondary schools are 49:51 and 47:53 respectively. It achieved MDG-4, child and infant mortality--- as it’s child mortality rate declined by 67%, it received UN-MDG-4 Award last year. It’s maternal morality rate declined by 40% but access to medical facilities and clinics is still below expectation mostly due to resource constraint. It is yet to achieve MDG-1, alleviation of poverty. However, it’s poverty reduced from nearly 59% to 32%, not a small achievement for a country where population density is highest and total population is over 150 million. These MDG goals were possible to achieve mainly because of leadership commitment, people’s participation, enforcement of social safety net and targeted and sustained approach in addition to active cooperation of government and non-government organizations. Given its tract record and leadership commitment, I can assure you, if resource flow is guaranteed, enhanced and accelerated, Bangladesh is sure to achieve the MDG goals by 2015. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance resource flow to Bangladesh without myriad and stringent condionalities.
On specific MDG, the Government may utilize social capital embedded in a particular community to guide them through peace process. Economic activities, for example, through micro credit in the form of small grouping may create deterrence for each other. This will not only elevate their economic situation by ending poverty, it will also keep them together to fight against any potential causes that may resort to violence.

MDGs can also build trusts and confidence of common people. Basic education and public health, for example, may create incentive for people to aspire for better life. This will also make conflict more expensive than peace not only for themselves, but also for their future generation. And therefore, it is unlikely that they resort to violence making lives vulnerable for themselves as well as for their kids.

Historical evidence suggests that poor countries have been much more likely to have civil wars than richer countries. James Fearon of Stanford University, after analyzing historical data of 161 countries between 1945 and 1999 has concluded that ‘Of the richest fifth of the countries, only about 1.5% had a civil war erupt within the next five years. By contrast, among the poorest fifth, 14.3% had a civil war start in the next five years. World Development Report 2011 has also buttressed the similar views that conflict is most frequent in poor, underdeveloped countries. This is what Collier and others termed as the conflict trap: conflict creates underdevelopment that in turn, encourages conflict. Therefore, if MDG goals could be achieved, the likeliness of wars and terror, violence and killing could be reduced.

We have noted with satisfaction a sharp decline of military expenditures between pre and post cold war period. For example, from 1986 to 1994, the world military expenditures decreased by 35.2% from $1,297b to $840 billion. The dividend yielding from such reduction has been channeled towards development cause either directly or indirectly. Such reduction of military expenditure or alternatively, peace dividend owing to end of cold war created a period of hope and development during Clinton’s presidency. Unfortunately, as per SIPRI Report, the expenditures have bounced back sharply again in 2010 at $1,630 (SIPRI, 2010).

Currently, 70 million children are out of school and there are over 796 million illiterate people worldwide and an estimated 412 million adults lack basic literacy and numeric skills in Asia. Basically out of 5 children, one is out of school, and 2 out of 3 can hardly complete their education--- dropout rate is staggering and quality education is a far cry across many nations. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the global community especially the development partners agreed to provide $16 billion per year for ‘Education for All’.
Unfortunately, they could only manage $2 billion in 2008 for education. The picture is getting dismal each year. As claimed by *Save the Children*, if rich countries were to transfer just six days’ worth of military spending to development assistance for basic education, we could close the $16 billion external financing gap for global education and achieve Education for All goals, putting all children into school by 2015. There is evidence that one year extra education results in an additional 7% income increase and a 10% fall in child death among women. Therefore, we need to raise the global leadership commitment to divert resources from military spending to education. May I ask this Forum to start a world wide Internet campaign to this end. May I also remind this gathering what Robert F. Kennedy said, ‘if you speak for a just cause, it will create a small ripple. When another will join and then another and another, and another then it will create a mighty wave that surely would shake and crumble the mightiest of the tyrannies’. In present day world, if you look around you, don’t you see ample evidence of it?

Excellencies, ladies and gentleman,

MDGs directly related with gender issues such as gender parity, infant mortality, maternal health, HIV/AIDS and so on require advancement of women both at the decision making level as well as operational level in the field. By addressing this, the government can integrate about 50% of community people in the main stream peace process. When women are advanced in a society, they are less likely to indulge into conflict. They not only represent about half of the population in terms of gender, they play a major role in the family in guiding their male counterpart and decide on the future well-being of their kids.

Conflict itself has a negative and devastative impact on achieving MDGs. World Bank, in its WDR 2011 has concluded based on statistical analysis that the conflict has clear and detrimental effects on achieving MDGs such as reduction of poverty and hunger, primary education, the reduction of child mortality, and access to water. They also found that the conflict has detrimental impacts on secondary education and gender parity. It is a vicious cycle of poverty and conflict: poverty and economic deprivation leads to conflict and the conflict itself leads to poverty and economic deprivation. To convert it into a virtuous cycle of development and peace, we need to take a balanced approach for achieving MDGs that would lead to sustainable peace and development.

These aspects of achieving MDGs are important to buttress the peacebuilding activities. However, these are not exhaustive. Therefore, the causal analysis of conflict is important while devising any mechanism for sustainable peace, and strategy should be customized accordingly to
address the needs of any conflicting situation. I am well aware that the variables in peacebuilding function cannot be conclusive, as in any other social analysis, the elements of MDGs are generally common in any conflicting situation. Other elements such as ethnic diversity, political opposition, religious issues and rights-based differences are also important. The conflicting parties, however, are likely to solve these problems through participatory dialogues when their material stake is high in any conflicting situation. From this perspective, there is an inverse relationship between achieving MDGs by a community and their propensity to involve `into conflict: the higher the stake, the lower the possibility of their involvement into any conflict.

To make peace sustainable and to prevent countries from relapsing into conflict, it is important to conduct the peacebuilding activities in a balanced way so that the issue of achieving MDGs is addressed with due consideration on other enabling environmental issues such as appropriate political process, ensuring security, job creation, human rights, law and order, and institution building. However, this process should be addressed based on the principles of country ownership, regional cooperation, system-wide-coherence and of course, with a goal to have sustainable development and peace. These goals are achievable provided these are matched with guaranteed, predictable, and affordable resource flow on a sustained basis, the deficiencies of which are becoming more evident every day. Therefore, we need this Forum, the opinion leaders, the business leaders, the civic society, the NGO and GO leaders, media and the public to come forward with a clarion call for a better world; a world without hunger and poverty, a world without war and terror, a world without deprivation and injustice, a world without conflict and threat of conflicts. Let us have a sustainable peace and development for good of mankind.

In Conclusion, is it time for nations and international agencies to review, reflect and recast their development models given the increasing uncertainty, conflicts, frustration, unhappiness, social inequity and joblessness across nations amidst of abundance and technological break-through that surely can be used for betterment of mankind? I thank you all.