The 11th Youth Assembly at the United Nations

Statement by

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H. E. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, distinguished representatives and colleagues, my young friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Today you have gathered here from all across the globe to attend the 11th Youth Assembly at the United Nations. You are here with one mission and it is; ‘we want a safer, better, more prosperous, more equitable, more inclusive society where hunger will be history, war and conflict will be thing of the past, and no one will be deprived of his or her basic rights’. We have come a long way, number of killer wars and devastating conflicts have gone down but yet we are facing one after another war and conflict that are draining out our resources and destabilizing our economies and also creating joblessness in societies. Such diversion of resources is limiting our opportunities for a sustainable world.

Dear Friends,

You will be surprised to know that many Least Developed Countries or LDCs especially none of the post conflict low income fragile countries could achieve a single Millennium Development Goals although there is evidence that once a country is out of violence or conflict, its growth rate could be significant. Therefore, we need peacebuilding, we need to create a mindset of 'culture of peace'. Culture of Peace tries to ensure 'respect for life, ending violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation'. The UNESCO Constitution reads, "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that differences of peace must be constructed". In fact, all hatred, all intolerance, misunderstanding and conflict emanate from a 'mindset of intolerance, superiority and greed'. Therefore, Bangladesh initiated a resolution entitled 'culture of peace' to build 'correct relationship' with societies and environment and we are thankful that it was passed with consensus for promoting social progress and better standard of life. We have to inculcate those values of tolerance, friendship, love, diversity, respect for all and you can do it. Secondly, the root causes of conflicts should also be addressed. Those roots lay in historical discrimination and deprivation. They also lay in closed and unequal world economic regimes and financial structures that bar the poorer countries to have a fair share that help aggravating unrest in these countries.

Millions of youth are unemployed in poorer countries, they find difficulty to attend schools or they lack nutrition to grow because of such economic structure. Therefore, we should fight for a unified economic regime that will lead to a political and social cohesion and stability.

Today, one billion people will go hungry to bed in the developing world. Therefore, we need what Secretary General often demands 'food security and also food efficiency'. We must be conscious of ‘food efficiency’ and ‘energy efficiency’ individually as well as collectively.
My dear young friends,

The majority of this planet earth is young. Out of a total 7 billion people, nearly 2.76 billion or 39.5% are between 15 to 40 years of age and another 1.85 billion or 26.4% are below 15 years of age. That means, nearly 66% of the global people is young or below the age of 40 years. Therefore, you are a real force and you need to exercise your God given faculties. God has given you all that you need; two hands, two feet, and a wonderful a brain that can think, that can create, that can motivate, that can innovate, that can empower you with knowledge, you with intelligence and wisdom and can enrich you with leadership role to guide this planet earth. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the basis of his 40 years of political life believes that 'empowering people' ---- empowering them with jobs, with skills, with education, with participation in governance, and empowering them by eliminating hunger and poverty, ending discrimination, terrorism, and by including the exclusive groups and vulnerable people, one can create conducive environment for sustainable development and lasting peace.

We need a sustainable earth, an earth where abuse and misuse of resources could be minimized, an earth where we can have not only food and energy security for all but also food and energy efficiency, an earth where we can achieve our goals of prosperity and peace without damaging the environment, an earth where we can guarantee a decent living standard, education and job for all. I have no doubt that human ingenuity and creativity, human motivation and competition can help achieve a sustainable world for all. My friends, you are young, and you need a mindset that would remind you time to time that 'I can do'. These three letters, I can do, are very powerful and I have no doubt that you can do. Remember, the worst enemy of our life is 'fear' and fear itself. So be courageous and acquire knowledge, technical know-how and a mind of openness to achieve your goals, our goals.

When I was a young kid, I read one poem of Kazi Nazrul Islam, our national poet and it says, 'Manusher Cheye Mohan kichu, Nohe kichu Mohiyan'. That means, there is nothing more superior or great than that of human being; human being is the greatest of all creations. Therefore, we must work together to establish and prove our greatness ---- we must establish a peaceful, sustainable and stable world of prosperity for all.

Today with these few words, may I welcome you for a better future for all of us?

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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I have been asked to speak about achieving MDG goals in my own country. Geographically, Bangladesh is as big as Iowa State and it has nearly 150 million people while Iowa has only 3
million. So you can easily understand the enormity, complexities and challenges of achieving MDG goals for a resource constraint, extremely densely populated country like Bangladesh that faces one after another cyclones and other natural disasters. But good news is, while in early 1970s, it was termed as a 'basket case with no hope of survival', it is now known as a model of economic development. It increased its food production from 11 million tons to over 33.4 million tons, and it became one of the top garment and apparel exporters of the world. In spite of global financial crises and speculative energy price hike, it achieved an average of 6.3% GDP growth rate in the last three years. It is the largest LDC in the world. You know that there are 49 LDCs where nearly 900 million people live and nearly 70% of them live below the poverty level, i.e. below $1 a day. But good news is; because of committed leadership, targeted and sustained approach and dynamism of its people, Bangladesh either has achieved or on tract in achieving most of the MDG goals. For example, MDG Goal 1- Reduce Extreme Poverty and Hunger by half. Bangladesh has reduced poverty from nearly 60% in 1991 to 29% in 2012 and it has also reduced the poverty gap from 17.2 in 1991 to 6.5 in 2010, more than half. Therefore, it has achieved the target of goal-1 but there cannot be any complacency as nearly 45 million still live below the poverty level and prevalence of malnourished children are still acute.

In case of Goals 2, 3 and 4 i.e. (1) achieving Universal Primary Education, (2) Gender equality & women empowerment, and (3) reducing Child Mortality respectively, Bangladesh did very well. It has nearly achieved 100% primary school enrolment but it is facing challenges to achieve 100% adult literacy rate and quality education for all. It has achieved gender parity or MDG-3. In its primary schools, 51% are female and 49% male and in secondary schools, female are 53% while male is 47 per cent. Bangladesh is a leader in women empowerment as it's Prime Minister, a visionary lady Sheikh Hasina believes, 'if you educate a man, you educate a person and if you educate a woman, you educate a family and a society'.

It has done pretty well in achieving MDG Goal 4: reduce Child Mortality. There are only 16 countries that are on tract in achieving MDG 4 on child mortality and Bangladesh is one of them. It reduced infant mortality rate by 67% and thus it achieved MDG4 Award in 2010. But Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI) still threaten lives of countless children and responsible for one-quarter of under-5 deaths.

In the area of MDG Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health and MDG-6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases, Bangladesh is on tract. It reduced its maternal death rate by 46% and it performed well in halting communicable diseases under goal-6.

But it is facing major problems in ensuring MDG Goal-7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability. As you know, Bangladesh has been identified as one of the worst victims of climate change fall out. If there is only 1 meter rise in sea water, nearly 20% of its land will go under water and
such will force its over 30 million people from their homes. They will lose their livelihood, their homes, their profession and will be forced to migrate to urban towns and cities and may create slumps and ghettos. Already the process has started. In 2007 and 2009, when cyclones 'Sidr' and 'Aila' visited us and although, because of our superior 'cyclone disaster preparedness' we could save human lives but it devastated our homes, roads and infrastructure and we had to divert our scarce resources to relief and rehabilitation away from investing in achieving MDG goals. Irony is that although we have almost zero contribution to carbon emission but we are the victim of erratic climatic changes and we are suffering and we are afraid of our sustainability. If the global community continue to ignore the issues of climate change; adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer, climate fund and climate migration, we are afraid, our achievements will go in drain. We urgently need to create Global Climate Fund and make it operative. Otherwise, it would be too late to manage the destruction, and rehabilitate 150m.

May I urge you to start a campaign in your campuses and in your neighborhoods to save this planet earth from the clutches of erratic climate change? If un-armed people are killed, we term it 'genocide', and if innocent people are uprooted from their homes and get killed, because of abuse of resources, will you call it 'ecocide'?

Lastly, in the area of MDG goal 8: Global Partnership for Development, the scenario is pretty poor. It may be reminded that Millennium Development Goals were a partnership between developing countries and the traditional development partners (DPs). Developing countries undertook certain responsibility to achieve MDG goals and the developed partners assured them financial and technological support to achieve those goals. Unfortunately, DPs could not keep up with their promise. For example, the DPs agreed to provide 0.7 percent of their GNI as ODA but except a handful few, the rest are far behind of their commitment. The major constraint of achieving MDG goals is the resource gap. Good news is; in the last Istanbul Programme of Action, the DPs agreed to reduce the gap and meet their commitments to LDCs. In the recently published 'MDG Financing Strategy for Bangladesh', it is estimated that $78.2 billion or $174 per head per annum for next 3 years would be required to achieve all MDG goals in Bangladesh. Not a big amount, basically a fraction of global defense expenditure of $1.7 trillion in 2011 (SIPRI, 2012). Therefore, to achieve all MDG goals, it is necessary for the DPs first to re-evaluate their priorities and they should be more generous and be more creative to meet their commitments. It is a fact that business as usual is not going to work. It is neither going to help the developed as well as the developing ones, neither your future. The time is running out, less than 3 more years to achieve MDG goals. Therefore, we need a global campaign across nations to divert resources to achieving MDG goals and the goals of Rio+20 Summit away from war and conflicts. Thank you.