

Launching of "Equal Futures Partnership"

Address by

Her Excellency **Sheikh Hasina**

Hon'ble Prime Minister
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Aston Room, InterContinental Barclay Hotel, New York, 24 September 2012

Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

US Secretary of States, Mrs. Hillary Clinton,
Fellow Partners to Equal Futures,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Afternoon to you all.

1. I congratulate Secretary Clinton for launching the "Equal Futures Partnership" Initiative today. It is an important initiative in our globalized world beset with many complex challenges calling for united response of all. I thank President Barack Obama for his historic call last year and I quote, "for breaking down the economic and political barriers that stand in the way of women and girls". He spoke of what lay unspoken deep in the heart of every woman and girl. He spoke of what I had been striving for, ever since my growing years. I thank Secretary Clinton for her invitation and I am happy to be here representing the over 75 million women and girls of Bangladesh and their aspirations.

2. I am a believer in women empowerment. Women and girls constitute half of the global population. Their equal participation can ensure actual optimum development of the world. In recent time, there has been progress, but not enough. Women's participation in all spheres of society is small. In our war of liberation, over 200,000 women sacrificed their chastity and honor. Thus, in our first Constitution, the Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman guaranteed women's equal rights as men. This made it easy for me to implement the New Women Development Policy 2011. It highlights free education for girls to grade 12; stipends to girls for higher education; free books at primary and secondary levels; free pre and post natal healthcare and nutrition, especially to mothers through the 12,000 community clinics.

3. Our government emphasizes on, political and economic empowerment of women. In our current term, 12,838 women were elected to the lowest tier of government and 69 as MPs. 30% of all government jobs is reserved for women. Women now hold high positions in the judiciary, administrative, diplomatic, armed and law enforcement services. Besides, 5 are cabinet members, one is the Deputy Leader of the House, one a Whip, and one a Mayor. Progress continues in empowering women with gender-responsive budget allocations; encouraging their role in civil society and media; business

and workforce aiming at 50% by 2021. Collateral free micro-credit is given with 5% service charge to rural women who now numbers 25 million. Women entrepreneurs receive 10% of the Small Enterprise Fund and 10% industrial plots. Currently 3 million women are working in the RMG sector and many are working abroad and sending remittances. We have enacted new laws for protection of women and children such as the Anti-Human Trafficking Act 2012; Prevention of Domestic Violence Act 2010, among others.

4. I conclude by pledging to raise women's political empowerment through their participation from 20% to 30% in the Parliament and in all tiers of leadership by 2021; economic empowerment by ensuring they comprise 50% of the total workforce by 2021; and their protection by enforcing implementation of the Domestic Violence Act of 2010. These would be a forward step in our contribution to a world of equal participation of women and men.

I thank you.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu.

May Bangladesh Live Forever.
