

**Cultural Diversity,
Ministerial Forum of the Asia-Pacific Region, 2012**

Speech by

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Prime Minister

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
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Bismillahir Rahmanur Rahim

Mr. Chairperson,
Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Morning to you all.

I thank the visionary Director General of UNESCO for holding the Cultural Diversity Ministerial Forum of the Asia-Pacific Region in Dhaka.

I am indeed delighted to be here at this historic inaugural event. I also warmly welcome you all, from across the world, to our country of varied beauty, color and culture.

A fertile deltaic state created out of rich alluvium soil brought from the Himalayas by 54 major and other rivers, and blessed by an agriculture friendly climate, and by a strategic location as gateway from South to Southeast Asia and beyond through land and sea, Bangladesh is a natural attraction.

People of all different races, religions, creed and cultures from ancient times were drawn to this land of abundance and mingled with the indigenous ones, and with their culture turned the land into a center of diversities.

Through years of living together, they learned to live in harmony and peace with their own identities and cultures in an all embracing secular society. Today all those metamorphosed into our distinct "Bengali Culture" and way of life.

Distinguished Guests,

Language, as we all know, is the most powerful vehicle for expression of cultural diversity. We are very proud that our nationalism originated largely from our language-based cultural heritage. The repression of our language "Bangla" was a blow on our "Bengali Culture", which led to a mass movement and loss of lives on 21 February, 1952 and gave birth to a powerful national movement.

It culminated finally in the emergence of sovereign Bangladesh, under the leadership of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation.

Here, I must record my deepest gratitude to UNESCO for declaring 21 February as "International Mother Language Day" now celebrated annually worldwide to honor and protect all mother tongues.

We have, therefore, established an International Mother Language Institute to promote languages.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is also one of few countries whose Constitution ensures protection and promotion of diversity of cultural expressions. Our Constitution commits us to identify, evaluate, safeguard, and utilize all our cultural activities, traditional or modern, for aesthetic or economic benefit of our people.

It has helped our people, which comprise many races and religions to have absolute freedom in practicing their own cultures and to live in peace and harmony.

Bangladesh has already ratified in 2007 the UNESCO "Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions". I hope all the remaining countries of the Asia-Pacific region will likewise to do the same and protect, promote and enrich their unique cultural expressions.

In recent years there has been a worldwide recognition of culture as a source of self-enrichment, sustainable development, poverty eradication, empowerment of the people and their active role in national development.

It has also led to huge cultural industry emerging around the world requiring measures to be taken for nourishing and protecting indigenous cultural practices.

For this, a survey of the cultural expressions, their evaluation, IP protection of individual countries is essential. Bangladesh has already conducted such a survey.

In cooperation with WIPO, we have also conducted a survey of our traditional cultural expressions and found items as Zamdani, Nakshikantha, Tangail Sari, Muslin silk, Baul and Mystic songs, and others contribute significantly to our GDP. I believe most developing countries will benefit in the same way through a survey.

The Asia-Pacific region comprises of 60 percent of the world's population and some of the oldest human civilizations. As we experience the ways of life and culture of the peoples of the individual Pacific island countries at one end and the other countries in the different sub-regions of Asia at the other end, we are overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of beauty, charm and color of the array of vibrant cultures reflected by the many races, ethnicities, faiths, and heritages comprising the Asia-Pacific Region.

Indeed, I believe our cultures do contribute significantly to the beauty of our world and make our lives fulfilling. I, sincerely hope that this Ministerial Forum will help flourish the multi-cultural nature of our region, and strengthen the argument that diversity and unity of world cultures, as defined in the UNESCO Convention 2005, is quite in conformity with protecting and preserving our cultural expressions.

I also believe this Forum on Cultural Diversity will further the cause of tolerance, democracy, human rights, and cumulative cooperation for cultural diversity for realization of long lasting world peace.

Let us share each other's culture and heritage for they have the strength to overcome the fearsome forces of terrorism, extremism and the other challenges of our globalized world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank Ms. Irina Bokova once again for holding the Forum here. I also thank the distinguished delegates for their presence at the Forum and extend to you a very warm welcome and enjoyable stay at Bangladesh.

I also hope the Forum will be a resounding success and that the "Dhaka Declaration" will herald intensive cooperation among all countries of the region.

Let us stand firm and united in our endeavor for harmonious diversity and let the thousand flowers representing our unique cultural diversities blossom and bloom making our world more colorful, beautiful and peaceful for our children and future generations.

I have now pleasure to declare the "Cultural Diversity Ministerial Forum of the Asia- Pacific region 2012" open._

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez.

Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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