

**US-Islamic World Forum  
Gala Dinner**

Keynote Speech  
By

Her Excellency **Sheikh Hasina**

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

Doha, 29 May 2012

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Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim

His Excellency  
Prime Minister Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabbar al Thani  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamu Alaikum and Good Evening to you all.

I thank you, Hon'ble Prime Minister, and Brookings Institute for inviting me to speak at the gala dinner of this year's US-Islamic World Forum. I also thank the organizers for the impeccable arrangements made, and for selecting this Forum's theme, 'New Voices New Directions,' emphasizing the challenge of change.

The recent socio-political developments across the continents have given way to changes in the political landscape, and emergence of new leadership in some countries. These changes have opened the way to new challenges giving birth to a new political vision, and promotion of sustainable democracy. The theme, therefore, for this year's Forum seems most appropriate to enable discussions on these and other challenges of change in our world, and in our way of life, even within our own regions.

Indeed, change is a constant but inevitable process. Today, the change around us is noticeable due to the fast pace of globalization and the instant dissemination of information around the world. Although change is posing new challenges to nations in different ways, it is also drawing our world closer.

After half a century in politics for people, I now believe that justice is the key to peace and peaceful change is best for societies, states, and the world. Societies thrive in peace when justice ensures the basic needs of the people. Similarly, states thrive when relations are based on justice and peace. I also believe that absence of justice leads to inequalities culminating in social turmoil, instability in societies, states and in regions.

It has, therefore, been for justice, a basic tenet and character of democracy, in all spheres of life that led to the birth of Bangladesh, and adoption of a Constitution that enshrined democracy, inclusiveness and human rights. Democracy, also respects freedom and harmonious living, and encourages sustainable development, which strengthen justice and empower people. With deep faith in these beliefs, I introduced a resolution on "People's Empowerment" that was adopted by the 66<sup>th</sup> UNGA in New York last year.

Thus, on assuming office in January 2009, I made efforts to entrench democracy and people's empowerment by strengthening our Commissions on Human Rights, Information, Anti-

Corruption and Election. The Election Commission updated the voter's list, prepared voter's identity cards, and introduced electronic voting machines for fair and credible elections. So far, 5,175 elections were held under our government, stretching from local government level elections to that of Mayors and by-election of MPs, to the satisfaction of all political parties, a unique feature in the history of our elections.

I would now like to share the experience of our journey to democracy, rule of law and social justice. For social justice, our focus is on education, healthcare, food and energy security, social safety measures, better livelihood, and gender equality in all spheres of life. Women are, particularly, assured of special support in education, healthcare, jobs, business, trade and entrepreneurship. Our ethnic minorities, the disadvantaged, the disabled and the elderly also receive the attention they deserve as citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A major "challenge of change" in our region is poverty, which I believe is our number one common enemy. It provides breeding ground for another challenge in our changing world, and that is, terrorism. Since they know no borders, concerted efforts of all states are required to face them.

The remedy is to prosper, for which connectivity allowing increasing trade, investment and economic activities, is very important. Our excellent relations with the neighbors, based on mutual respect, reciprocity and justice, have helped us all make good progress in developing connectivity in South Asia.

Our regional cooperation against terrorism is also excellent. As a victim myself, losing 18 family members, including three brothers, one only 10 years old, my mother and my father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, also the Father of the Nation, to assassins on 15 August 1975, I am against terrorism. My resolve is cemented by the 19 attempts and especially a 13 grenade attack on me on 21 August 2004 at a public rally held in protest against terrorism, causing death of 24 people with hundreds injured. My effort to eliminate terrorism from Bangladesh has been fully endorsed and supported by our good friends around the world.

Our friends are also supporting our efforts in tackling the challenges of development. Despite the recent world recession, we managed GDP growth rate in the last three years of over 6.0 % and also reduced poverty by 10 percent through education, healthcare, social safety nets, and overall socio-economic development. In education, we achieved 99% school enrollment at the primary level, and gender equality at both primary and secondary levels. Healthcare service is delivered through 11,500 community health centers in the rural areas. Our success in reducing maternal mortality was lauded by the UN, and in child mortality was rewarded by the UN MDG-4 Award in 2010.

Our social safety nets include increasing pension and number of old people, widowed and distressed women; Ashrayan or homes for the homeless; "One Home-One Farm" for small land owners; employment of one member from every poor family; etc. Food security is a success story with steady delivery of fertilizers, seeds, agricultural information, drought and flood resistant rice varieties etc.

Climate change challenges are being met by a 134 point adaptation and mitigation plan which includes, dredging of rivers, afforesting 20% of land to create a carbon sink, improving disaster early warning system, green belts on coastal and river embankments, promoting renewable energy etc.

A major challenge of climate change is disaster induced migrants. Climate change is not our doing but of developed and emerging economies. The problem should, therefore, be solved by relocating the migrants to their countries. This would also meet developed economies' challenge of decreasing population and labor shortages which are adversely affecting their economic growth. At present, we are meeting these challenges through our own Climate Change Trust Fund

as well as through Climate Change Resilience Fund set up by our development partners. Our internet services connecting 4,501 Union Information and Service Centers, 483 Upazillas and the 64 districts; 30 million internet and 90 million mobile subscribers; are boosting our progress. Excellencies,

In our globalized world, boundaries lose significance to green house gas emissions, economic migration, terrorism etc. Least developed countries like Bangladesh need support of resourceful and developed countries in tackling these problems. Indeed, the challenge of climate change, population increase, fresh water shortages, etc, calls for a universal united effort in facing them and other challenges of change.

Thanks to the State of Qatar and the Brooking's Institute for the US - Islamic World Forum providing scope to share views and to formulate future national and global strategies.

The world, particularly the developed, has realized that a relationship with the Islamic World, based on justice is vital, and special understanding of the distinct code of life and culture of the 1.5 billion Muslims, is essential for real peace and actual stability.

Dialogue, investment, trade concessions, and support to the Islamic world are, therefore, very fruitful efforts. Bangladesh is fortunate to attract attention, possibly due to our secular, inclusive society of people of mixed ethnicities who are also non-violent in nature. Though 90% of our 160 million people are Muslims, we are exceptionally tolerant, and are all embracing in nature and temperament.

Our foreign policy dictum is "Friendship towards all, Malice towards none" as established by the Father of the Nation, and our national psyche is "Live and Let Live". Thus, followers of all religions in our country have found harmony and peace in living together. In this respect, Bangladesh is similar to the United States, and this is the basis of our two countries' friendship. Bangladesh is included in all the four initiatives of President Obama, namely, on health; climate change; feed the future; and engagement with the Muslim world. The United States is also our strong partner in democracy, rule of law, women empowerment, education, social safety nets, and countering terrorism etc.

There is no doubt that the United States, the Islamic and the entire world has understood the need to live together and face united the new and deadly challenges of change, threatening our global village. In this ever evolving arrangement, there will be difficulties and complexities calling for greater tolerance, understanding, cooperation and adjustment.

All of us will need to open our minds and hearts in assessing the needs of others, and be willing to compromise and make sacrifice, on the basis of justice and fairness, and thereby, achieve a world of peace and harmony, for our future generations.

I thank you all.

Khoda Hafez  
Joi Bangla, Joi Bangabandhu  
May Bangladesh Live Forever.

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