

**Statement by Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman, Charge d'Affaires of the Bangladesh
Permanent Mission at the General Segment of the Durban Review Conference
Geneva, 20-24 April 2009**

Mr. President,

Allow me to congratulate you on your election to the Chair. I am confident that under your able leadership, the Conference will achieve its objectives.

I would also put on record, our sincere appreciation to Ms. Navanethem Pillay, High Commissioner for Human Rights, for her personal commitment to the success of this Conference.

Mr. President,

The Durban Declaration and Plan of Action (DDPA) remains a milestone in the fight against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Declaration reaffirmed that every human being has the right to a life of dignity and that nobody should be subjected to insult or offence because of his or her race, colour, religion, nationality or origin. The Plan of Action provided for a comprehensive set of steps to eliminate acts of racism and xenophobia.

After eight years of the adoption of DDPA, it is high time that we review the progress in its implementation. As we are taking stock of our initiatives and actions, we are also benefiting from our experiences and perspectives. We are here not to finger point but to share the practices that have proved successful and to reflect on the areas where more work is needed in fighting the scourge.

There have been some progresses in the fight against racism. This fact cannot be denied. A number of countries have undertaken measures to implement DDPA. This has not, however, been proved enough. Racial prejudice, xenophobia, and intolerance persist in many societies along with the new and contemporary manifestations. People continue to be victimized because they belong to a particular national, ethnic, or religious group. Theories of racial superiority continue to be propagated and practiced. Media is being used to incite prejudice and discrimination. The internet is being misappropriated to spread racial hatred. More worrisome, political platforms are being

used to legitimize such policies. As a result, we are witnessing resurgence of racism, xenophobia and related intolerance in some parts.

One of the new manifestations of racism is treatment of religious minorities in some countries of the west. Certain religions have been stereotyped in those societies exposing followers to hatred and possible discrimination. The religion of Islam is stigmatized and defamed undermining the rights and dignity of its followers.

Another contemporary manifestation of racism is the discrimination against migrants. This group of people has been the victim of the worst form of racism and xenophobia. Authorities remain apathetic to discrimination in wages, housing, and education, or to incidents of violence against migrants. Some prohibit discrimination on paper but are not vigilant enough to prevent or punish violations.

Mr. President,

We have always regarded racism and racial discrimination as the anti-thesis of everything humanity stands for. It is a negation of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are insidious, corrosive and, if left to fester, can be detrimental to societies. We have many examples of such.

Surely, actions are required at national, regional and international level. At the national level, legislation must be adopted and implemented to stem racist ideologies and practices and prevent advocacy of hatred and intolerance. The sense of impunity for racist crimes must be eliminated through effective and timely prosecution.

Freedom of expression constitutes one of the essential elements of democratic and tolerant society. We must promote freedom to the maximum limit permissible under article 20 of ICCPR. Freedom of expression must not be abused for propagation of racist prejudice or religious intolerance.

The Constitution of Bangladesh expressly forbids discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex or birthplace. It guarantees equality before law, and equality of opportunity for all citizens. It safeguards the legitimate rights and interests of minorities and provides affirmative action programmes for the disadvantaged groups.

Appropriate laws supplement this constitutional provision. Our independent judiciary, an ever-vigilant media and an active civil society have strengthened the government's efforts for attaining equality and non-discrimination. We are committed to combating and eliminating discrimination in all its manifestation. We are determined to counter the forces that seek to destroy the values of democracy and rule of law, pluralism, tolerance and diversity.

Internationally, we have supported the fight against racist practices and racial intolerance. We are parties to all the major human rights conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination. Despite our limitations, we are endeavoring to fulfill our obligations.

Based on principled position, we have lent support to the persecuted communities around the globe in their defense of legitimate rights. It is no wonder that we are unequivocal in our rejection of policies and practices of the occupying power in the Middle East. The people of Palestine, like elsewhere, are entitled to pursue their life in conditions of freedom, safety and dignity.

Finally Mr. President,

I call upon all to rededicate ourselves to the full implementation of DDPA.

Unfortunate absence of some countries in this Conference should not frustrate our collective resolve to fight racism and racial discrimination. This will be a setback for the countless victims and show of disrespect to all those who have sacrificed their lives in the struggle against racism. Let us ignore divisive forces and demonstrate that we can create a world where the promise of 'dignity and justice for all' is not an empty slogan but a reality.

I thank you Mr. President.