

Hon'ble President of the Assembly,
IPU President,
IPU Secretary General,
Members of the IPU Executive Committee,
Hon. Speakers, Deputy Speakers and Heads of Delegations,
Distinguished Delegates, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues, Fellow participants, Assalamu Alaikum. Very good day.

It is indeed a great honor for me to deliver speech amidst of these august gathering. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to you on behalf of Hon'ble speaker of Bangladesh parliament Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP, Bangladesh delegation and my own behalf.

As the curtain rises on the Inter-Parliamentary Union's 147th Assembly, it is a privilege for me to address and welcome you all at today's General Debate session on the theme of "Parliamentary action for peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16)." The General Debate will provide a platform for delegates to deliberate, exchange views and galvanize parliamentary action in this area. The 16th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 16) to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels" represents a new milestone. As we know IPU promotes democracy and defends the human rights of parliamentarians, during this Assembly it will offer opportunities for exchanges on good practices to promote inclusion and support peaceful coexistence as a prerequisite of resilient, cohesive and democratic societies.

Dear Parliamentarians,

The SDGs' 2030 Agenda recognizes the need to establish peaceful, fair and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice which is based on respect for human rights, effective rule of law and transparent, effective and accountable institutions. SDG 16 promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels- has been identified as a Goal that is both an outcome and at the same time enabler of sustainable development. In order to create a peaceful state, it needs effective and inclusive institutions that can deliver human need, like education, healthcare, economics, and environments protection. SDG 16 is closely interlinked with other SDGs, as without peace, justice and inclusion, achieving goals such as ending poverty, ensuring education, promoting economic growth can be difficult or impossible to attain. The state of play with regard to the implementation of SDG 16 indicates that substantial progress is still needed in order to achieve the SDG targets by 2030. Violent conflicts continue to affect many parts of the world, societal violence remains widespread in many countries and violence against women and children in particular remains a pervasive phenomenon, especially in developing countries. The pandemic has erased much previous progress on the SDGs, and led to restrictions on freedoms and more limited government accountability.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is a peace-loving country. Homogeneous society, communal harmony, and political stability have shaped it as a conflict-free state. Despite of that as a densely populated country, violence and insecurity remains a reality. Effective and proactive initiatives from the Government of Bangladesh have improved the law-and-order situation. Since court case backlogs are a serious threat to the access to justice, resolving cases through alternative dispute resolution has been encouraged. Proper and effective implementation of various governance tools are expected to create a responsive, transparent and accountable public service which in turn will act as preventive action against bribery and corruption. Capacity building of the government officials, introduction of cutting-edge technology, sincere cooperation from NGOs, CSOs and most importantly meaningful participation of all citizens can guarantee successful achievement of SDG-16.

Dear Parliamentarians,

As a Nation, time and again, Bangladesh stood firm and uncompromising against all forms of racial discrimination. The clarion call of our Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on 7 March 1971, inspired and united the Nation to resolutely stood against discrimination and injustice and wage a War of Liberation to realize their rights irrespective of their racial origin. The Constitution of Bangladesh safeguarded equality of all citizens irrespective of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. As a state party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Bangladesh supports the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Historically, communal harmony is a significant trait of the Bangalee society. The people of different ethnicities and religions have been living together with peace and harmony in Bangladesh. Today, the country is globally acclaimed as a tolerant and inclusive society that promotes peace, pluralism, democracy, freedom, liberalism and development.

Bangladesh is among the few countries that have experienced one of the worst forms of genocide during the War of Liberation in 1971. To pay deep homage to the victims of the Genocide of 1971 and uphold our commitment to prevent these crimes against humanity, our parliament has decided to observe 25 March as 'Genocide Day'. Bangladesh believes in 'culture of cooperation' over 'culture of conflict', peaceful settlement of disputes and peaceful changes in international arena through the end of racism. Besides, the trial of the war criminals, who opposed the country's liberation war and served the purpose of Pakistani occupation forces by committing mass-killing, genocide, rape, looting, arson attack is rare achievement of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Our Prime Minister also ensured the trial of the perpetrators of the assassination of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu and most members of his family, who were brutally killed in the early hours of 15 August 1975. Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rule of law has been established in the society by trying the killer of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, local collaborators, killer & criminals who did crime against humanity in 1971 liberation war.

Distinguished Delegates,

Our primary motivation for the global peace is our glorious Liberation War and the promises preserved in our constitution for promoting the 'international peace, security and solidarity'. Our commitment to peace and human rights is aptly reflected in the maiden speech of Bangladesh to the United Nations General Assembly in 1974, where the Father of the Nation stated, "The very struggle of Bangladesh symbolized the universal struggle for peace and justice. It was, therefore, only natural that Bangladesh, from its very inception, should stand firmly by the side of the oppressed people of the world." Since independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the country has emphasized on the principle of "Friendship to all, malice to none". This message of friendship undoubtedly could make a difference in the lives of the people throughout the world for making a Family of Nations. Bangladesh, diplomatically always remains actively engaged in the process leading up to the adoption of the resolutions and thereafter remains engaged in the ensuing 'surge in peace diplomacy' in the General Assembly, Security Council and Peacebuilding Commission. The journey of Bangladeshi peacekeepers attiring the Blue Helmet began in 1988, since then Bangladesh Armed Forces is always responding promptly to the United Nations (UN) call for strengthening the world peace and stability by contributing her troops including the police contingents for peacekeeping.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bangladesh is a secular democratic country. Bangladesh takes pride that, although being a less endowed country, we stand out as an inherently inclusive society of 165 million people, the 8th largest population in the world. For such a highly populated country, severely affected by climate change and deeply impacted by the hosting of 1.1 million forcibly displaced Rohingyas, a miracle needed to be done to maintain peaceful co-existence and social harmony. The Government of Bangladesh maintains 'zero tolerance' policy to any form of violence against religious minorities under any pretext.

In recent years Bangladesh has enacted a number of laws and developed several strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism including the Anti-terrorism Act, 2009 (amended in 2013), Money Laundering Prevention Act, 2012, Mutual Legal Assistance Act, 2012 and Digital Security Act, 2018. Regarding ethnic minorities, the 15th amendment of the Constitution has further upheld and protects the right, language and religion of ethnic people of Bangladesh. The present Government signed the historic Peace Agreement in 1997 with the ethnic minority leaders of Chittagong Hill Tracts, ending decades-old grievances and armed conflict.

Dear Parliamentarians,

Bangladesh is the flag-bearer of the norm-setting resolution on "Culture of Peace" in the United Nations. Bangladesh took the lead in introducing the normative agenda item "Culture of Peace" in the General Assembly and followed up with the flagship resolution entitled "Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace". The

resolution was adopted on 13 September 1999, during the first tenure of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Since then, Bangladesh has been facilitating this resolution every year. Bangladesh considers the "Culture of Peace" as an overarching notion strengthening the message for peace in years to come and moving beyond the landmark Agenda 2030. The whole-of-society approach was addressed as being core in building tolerance, where government, religious leaders, youth and women work jointly towards achieving SDG 2030. Without tolerance sustainable development and achieving the global and continental agendas and building peaceful cohesive communities would be impossible. The 'leave no one behind' policies that underpin most of these frameworks depend on tolerance, social justice, and peaceful coexistence of inclusive societies under the backdrop of strong institutions.

Bangladesh remains fully committed to the implementation of this concept through action-oriented policy interventions in eight programme areas of the 'Program of Action on Culture of Peace'– education, sustainable economic and social development, respect of human rights, equality between men and women, democratic participation, tolerance and solidarity, free flow of information and knowledge and international peace and security. In this connection, Bangladesh continues to encourage intercultural and interreligious dialogue, bridging divides, reducing inequalities, peaceful settlement of disputes, and harnessing harmony among people, communities and societies. Culture of Peace can be the key to the response and recovery efforts to build back a better world.

Distinguished Delegates,

In Bangladesh's perspective, the vision of women empowerment, their peaceful coexistence and role for making an inclusive society based on social justice is predominant. Bangladesh is now being acclaimed as a model before the world for women empowerment. At present Leader of the House, Speaker, Deputy Leader of the House, Leader of the Opposition of Bangladesh Parliament- all are women. There are 50 seats reserved for women in the parliament, they may also come through direct election. Hon'ble Speaker Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury is the current and the first female Speaker of the Bangladesh National Parliament since April 2013. At 46 years of age, she became the youngest to assume the office. She was the Chairperson of the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) between 2014 and 2017. Earlier she also served as State Minister of Women and Children Affairs.

The Father of the Nation Bangabandhu started the process of uplifting the women status by establishing equal rights of woman with man in all spheres of life as constitutional obligation under Article-28. The Government of Bangladesh is now implementing Bangabandhu's progressive vision through comprehensive initiatives aimed at ensuring women's economic and social empowerment, political and administrative empowerment and creation of next-level skills for participation of women in business and industries. After successfully implementing the pledge to build a Digital Bangladesh, Hon'ble Prime Minister is working relentlessly towards the implementation of SDGs by 2030 and building a Smart Bangladesh by 2041 and smart women will undoubtedly play a unique role in building a smart country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Parliament is the institution to ensure accountability and transparency in public expenditure and institutional performance through the functions of various parliamentary standing committees. As we enter the decade of action on SDGs, parliaments must have the capacity to take a more up-front role, including by conducting critical reviews of relevant laws, policies, and programmes to ensure they align with nationally defined priorities in the implementation of the SDGs, and in particular SDG 16. Parliaments also play a vital role in financing efforts to implement the SDGs by approving national budgets and passing legislation to establish dedicated SDG funds. They must be duly diligent in their oversight to uncover inefficiencies and corrupt practices, to protect these funds from waste and fraud. SDGs are an opportunity for parliamentarians to demonstrate their commitment to improving people's lives.

Lastly, we believe that to build cohesive and inclusive societies based on peace, justice and strong institutions the world must inculcate a mindset of tolerance, respect and love for others irrespective of religion, ethnicity, race and colour to achieve peace, trust and harmony. From time immemorial, Bangladesh greatly values the principles of tolerance, secularism, ethnic diversity and communal harmony.

On this note, I wish you fruitful deliberations and a productive Debate Session. Thank you all.