



STAND UP AGAINST POVERTY THROUGH NATIONAL UNITY

Anti-Poverty Rally throughout the Country
16-18 October 2009

Speech by the Chair

Md. Abdul Hamid Advocate

Speaker

Bangladesh Parliament and
Chairperson, Anti-Poverty Campaign of Parliament

Bangabandhu International Conference Centre
17 October 2009, 3:00 pm.

Anti-Poverty Campaign National Committee



ENDPOVERTY
2015
millennium campaign

জেগে ওঠোঁ রুখে দাঁড়াও
শোষণ বন্ধনা বৈষম্য
স্বাধীনতা দায়িত্ববাহী বাংলাদেশ চাই এখনই

Assalamu Alaikum,

Hon'ble Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina, National Leaders, Members of the Council of Ministers, Hon'ble Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Chief Whip of the Bangladesh Parliament and Chairperson of the APPG Vice-Principal Abdus Shahid, Members of Parliament, APPG Secretary General Shishir Shil, Chairman of Bangladesh Economic Association Dr. Quazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Senior Government and Military officials, Global Director of the United Nations Millennium Campaign (UNMC)-Salil Shetty, Diplomats, Representatives of the Development Partners, Members of the Civil Society, media personnel representing print and electronic media including Bangladesh Television and my dear brothers and sisters across the country.

On behalf of the Bangladesh Parliament, please accept my heartfelt welcome to this historic anti-poverty grand rally.

The task of building Bangladesh free from hunger and poverty is an issue of national importance. There is no alternative to building consensus on this issue. I have expected that both government and oppositions would come to an agreement on an important issue like poverty alleviation. With that objective in mind and due respect as well, I invited Hon'ble Leader of the Opposition side by side with Hon'ble Prime Minister to such a historic occasion. She also gave her consent to it. With a deep sense of regret, I want to inform you all that when all preparations were complete and the whole nation was eagerly waiting to see the two leaders on a same platform to take an oath to work unitedly on all national issues including poverty alleviation, Hon'ble Leader of the Opposition quite abruptly disagreed yesterday to attend this function. As a matter of fact, I have taken all preparations to hold such a historic rally after getting her due consent. The issues she has raised as reasons for not to attend the event could have been mentioned even at this gathering. And the reactions of the government would have come up at the same time. I want to make it clear that quite impartially I have been conducting the House as per the Constitution as well as the Rules of Business. There was no influence at all in conducting the House. This rally has been organized on behalf of the Jatiya Sangsad. This is neither a political rally nor any group's gathering. Here both the Head of the Government and Leader of the Opposition are invited as guests. Hence, the absence of Hon'ble Leader of the Opposition has hurt me. The rally would have been a meaningful one, had she joined it. Still, I hope both the government and the opposition will join hands together in future to work on all national issues including poverty alleviation. Today we are going to add a new chapter in the country's political history from this highly auspicious occasion.

You are already aware that millions of people, already gathered in such rallies in various parts of the country, have been tied into one string through the digital system, putting all of us within the range of our sights in all these places. This is a highly memorable moment for all of us in the history of Bangladesh as this rally does not belong to any particular political party or entity. People from all walks of life, shoulder to shoulder, stood in one line today with one specific goal and demand-“we want Bangladesh free from poverty, and we want it right now.” This is the demand of all to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh. Hon'ble Prime Minister is with all of us. All national leaders, Members of the Council of Ministers, Members of Parliament and Representatives of citizenry are here setting an unprecedented example with the presence of all sections of the people. It is a unique national unity.

My dear Countrymen,

Today is the International Poverty Eradication Day. Millions of poverty-stricken people from across the world, particularly from Asia, Africa and Latin America, are reiterating their commitment to say good-bye to poverty and hunger. We in Bangladesh are expressing our solidarity with the world as we are also promise-bound to drive out poverty, hunger and deprivation from the world.

Respected leaders and my dear countrymen,

By the grace of the Almighty, we have once again started our journey towards democracy after so many setbacks and deadlocks. This hard-earned democracy is adorned by the glories of many sacrifices. The ultimate goal of our democracy is to build Bangladesh as an abode of happiness and prosperity, free from hunger and poverty. We have dreamt of such a country on the eve of our great War of Liberation. During the last 38 years since Independence, we found very few moments of opportunities to realize this dream. But we have utterly failed to take advantage of those opportunities. The sun that has brought for us a great possibility has set in with the tragic assassination of the founder of Bangladesh state, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. And that was the beginning of violence, murder, military coup, autocracy, and rampant corruption etc. for a prolonged period of time. However, being in a state of destruction, we have again woken up for rebuilding our country. We have successfully consolidated democracy at the cost of fresh blood.

Hon'ble Leaders,

We will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our Independence in 2021, we must complete all the necessary preparations beforehand. We also need to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as announced by the United Nations and committed by the

Government of Bangladesh by 2015. We must achieve specific targets in social and economic arenas by alleviating poverty and reducing illiteracy, malnutrition and maternal mortality along with the protection of environment. You will be happy to note that we have already been able to fulfill a target related to primary education. We are already on track in achieving other targets and goals in MDGs as well.

We should not forget the fact that we the 150 million people are living in this small geographical area, which is known as the most populous country in the world. Over the last few decades, we have been maintaining the continuity of our economic progress. We had the GDP rate of around 6 percent during the last few years. In the social sector, we have our credit with several amazing records, of which primary education is worth mentionable here. Despite all these achievements, hunger, poverty, illiteracy, ill health, deprivation and natural disasters are also common in everyday life. After 38 years of our Independence, still 40 percent of our people are poor and 25 percent are extreme poor. These extreme poor people earn Taka 16-22 daily on an average, which stands out as a great wonder as to how they support their family members with such a meager income.

Still, half of the people in Bangladesh do not know how to write or read. Health facilities are still not within the reach of poor and marginal people. Only one physician is for each 1,500 people and only one Nurse for each 4,500 people-a crude reality which cannot be accepted. More so is that one in each three babies dies of malnutrition. The male dominated social structure is still standing out as a big obstacle towards establishing woman's rights and dignity. Still we see violence against woman in the form of medieval barbarity.

Today, we are facing many crises at the national level with terrorism and extremism standing out as big challenges against peace and stability of our state and society. The blind religious militancy wants to push us back to the darkness, and women to the middle age. The adverse impact of global climate change is gradually causing us too much. A large number of people who live in the coastal and Hoar areas are the worst victims of climate change loosing their lives and livelihoods. In addition, issues of food security and the rights of the small farmers have become one of the biggest challenges of the time.

Dear Guests,

Undeniably, the process of poverty alleviation is intrinsically linked with good governance and corruption. Reducing corruption and ensuring good governance are the preconditions for building a poverty-free society. However, corruption remains as a global problem. Corruption is evident in varying degrees in both the developed and

developing countries. As a social disease corruption destroys all our achievements and creates poverty and disparity. It essentially destroys the fundamental basis of democracy and good governance. It is the time to stand against corruption to build poverty-free Bangladesh. I want to categorically mention that accountability and transparency will be the fundamental parameters of all our activities. The stance of all of us, irrespective of political and ideological differences will be against corruption.

Like my fellow countrymen, I am also hopeful. You, Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with the heads of government and state of 189 countries in 2000 signed the charter of MDGs with the aim of bringing down poverty by half in Bangladesh within 2015. I firmly believe that the ongoing anti-poverty campaign under your dynamic leadership would be able to reach that goal. I hope all will happily respond to your call to build a poverty-free Bangladesh.

Hon'ble Members of Parliament and National Leaders,

Truly, an effective democratic system paves the way for attaining peace, stability, development and prosperity. A dynamic and active parliamentary democracy is one of the preconditions for consolidation of democracy and progress. Your presence is just like a beacon of light or a flame of lamp. The light emanating from the Jatiya Sangsad is enlightening the state as well as the society. Tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, debate-discussion-debate seem to be fundamental for flourishing democracy.

It is not unknown to us that the question of peace, stability and prosperity is inextricably linked with combating poverty. Poverty is multidimensional. It cannot be reduced simply by raising the level of income; economic growth does not automatically ensure reduction of poverty. Often, faulty development policies and programs cause poverty to happen. Hence, development policies require thoughtful analysis and careful review.

Democracy and Development go in hands. People's development and rights cannot be ensured without practicing democracy at every sphere of society and state. The parliamentary practice that we have already set in motion must be upheld through our responsible behaviour. I fervently appeal to all political parties for their responsible behavior essential for restoring and flourishing the parliamentary democracy.

Respected Leaders and My Dear Countrymen,

It's a historic day indeed, as we have declared a war against poverty and hunger together. We know that individual, group, institution, and even the government alone, cannot possibly win this battle against poverty. Let me quote a sentence from

Rabindranath Tagore's writings. He wrote, "poverty is just like the fear of ghost-when alone, it comes, when united, it flees away". Since we are all united against poverty and hunger today, poverty must find its way out. I believe from the core of my heart that our slogan-"National Unity To Resist Poverty" enshrined in the International Poverty Eradication Day will become a meaningful one; Bangabandhu's Sonar Bangla will eventually be materialized.

I heartily welcome millions of people, who have gathered in all these rallies in different places on this historic and auspicious occasion for establishing a national unity for progress and prosperity by bringing an end to hunger, poverty and deprivation. Let me conclude my speech by expressing heartfelt gratitude and congratulations to the Hon'ble chief guest Prime minister Sheikh Hasina and every one of you who have attended this grand occasion to make it a great success.

Allah Hafez, Long live Bangladesh