



Speech by **Mr. Neal Walker**
UN Resident Coordinator, Bangladesh
UN Day 2011 ● 24 October 2011

Honorable Chief Guest, H.E. Mr. A.M.A. Muhith, Minister, Ministry of Finance;
Excellencies, Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends;

Assalamu Alaikum and a very warm welcome to you all.

It is great to be here with all of you today, to commemorate the 66th anniversary of the United Nations Charter. I would like to welcome all of you, and my special thanks to the Honorable Minister of Finance, Mr. A.M.A. Muhith, and our colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for joining us here today.

From my perspective as a relative newcomer in Bangladesh, I see an amazing relationship, almost an emotional link, between the history of Bangladesh as an independent nation and the United Nations. Both were born out of the devastation of war, both are committed to the highest ideals of world peace, social justice and development. On 17 September 1974, Bangladesh was officially welcomed into the United Nations family. Founder of the country, Former Prime Minister and President, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his first speech to the UN General Assembly, said it best: *“The noble ideals enshrined in the UN Charter are the very ideals for which millions of our people have made the supreme sacrifice. The Bengali nation fully commits itself to the building of a world order, in which the aspiration of all men for peace and justice will be realized.”*

Since then, Bangladesh has continued to work closely with the United Nations to advance global peace and security throughout the world. The country’s commitment to a culture of peace, support for human rights, democracy, rule of law, women’s empowerment, secularism and tolerance have made Bangladesh a natural and a highly regarded partner of the United Nations.

Perhaps most visibly, Bangladesh is among the top contributing countries to **UN Peacekeeping operations**. Currently, more than 10,500 Bangladeshi men and women serve in 11 UN peacekeeping missions in 10 countries. The professionalism of Bangladeshi peacekeepers is widely recognized. I am proud to note that the first-ever all women’s contingent of police is from Bangladesh, deployed in Haiti. On a somber note, I would like to pay tribute to the 103 brave Bangladeshi peacekeepers who have given their lives over the years in service to the ideals upon which the UN was built.

Even while I recognize the important role that Bangladesh has had in peacekeeping, I would like to emphasize that the UN-Bangladesh relationship is much deeper. As a pro-active and engaged Member State, Bangladesh has also played a notable role across the full range of the United Nations, in ideas and in leadership. For example Bangladesh has served as:

- Vice President of the UN *General Assembly* in 1975
- President of the UN *General Assembly* in 2003
- Member of the *Security Council* in 1979 and again in 2000
- Chair of *G-77* in 1982
- Member of *ECOSOC* six times in the past; currently until December 2012
- Member of *Human Rights Council* in 2006; currently until June 2012
- President of the *Conference of Disarmament* in 2010
- Member of *UN Executive Boards* 2011: UNDP/UNFPA and UNICEF
- Member of *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*
- *Co-sponsor of four of the five resolutions on rights of women* subsequently adopted by UNGA at its 55th session in 2000.

The list goes on... but I think you will understand my point: by its committed actions, its pro-active engagement, its leadership, Bangladesh has demonstrated since its inception as a nation, a deep alignment with the fundamental goals of the United Nations as enshrined in our Charter, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in our mutual quest for an equitable society where men and women stand equal, and with equal opportunity for all citizens.

These are lofty words, but after six months here, I am more than ever convinced, they are true, they are an accurate description of an important alliance. On the one hand, we have the United Nations which, from humble and hopeful beginnings in 1945, has evolved into the world's largest multi-lateral institution addressing the key issues and challenges related to humanity's well-being. On the other hand, we have Bangladesh, a nation which began as one of the poorest countries in the world, and which can now show profound achievements. The country has moved strongly into democracy, and the quality of elections is a testament to progress. The country has achieved economic growth averaging over 6% per annum over the past decade, despite a period of global economic turmoil. And, the country has made real progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the MDG's, with significant reductions in poverty, improvements in maternal mortality rates and in primary education.

But, on this important day, let us also recognize profound truths. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world; it stands as one of the country's most vulnerable to the threat of climate change, with water from the melting Himalayas roaring down from the north, and the sea rising from the south. These challenges are further complicated by the global economic crisis and the growing intensity of typhoons and other natural disasters that are a fact of life for the citizens of Bangladesh. **In short, THERE IS MUCH WORK TO DO!**

I would like to speak now, for all of the staff of every agency of the United Nations, working in Bangladesh, when I state unequivocally, that we are here, and proud to be, Bangladesh's go-to partners, the people you know that are focused on results that are aligned with addressing the most serious challenges facing the country. We bring global expertise, but we're proud to showcase our national expertise, as well. Many of our national experts are here with us today. Others, who have worked with us in the past, have moved beyond their work with UN and are in government, in civil society, in the armed forces, and even in the private sector. But once a UN staffer, you are always part of our team, and so today is for all of those colleagues, as well.

I don't want to drone on and on, about the UN. At least so far, I do not see anybody asleep, so I will -- just briefly -- summarize some of the work we are doing.

The eight *Millennium Development Goals*' to be achieved by 2015 and agreed by all 193 UN Member States, serve as the UN's major guidelines in achieving concrete and measurable development results, globally and in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, in 2010, the UN and the Government did a joint assessment of the MDG status. Then, we analyzed the Government's Sixth Five to see how the UN might best contribute to national objectives, taking into account our mandates and our strengths. The result of that comprehensive process is the *UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Bangladesh*. The UNDAF defines the major areas where the UN will implement priority actions to reach the MDG goals by 2015. Specifically, the *UN System in Bangladesh* will focus our support on:

- *Democratic Governance and Human Rights* by strengthening government, justice and human rights institutions.
- *Pro-poor Growth with Equity* through inclusive economic growth, extending benefits to the urban and rural poor.
- *Social Services for Human Development* through equitable access to services and effective social protection policies.
- *Food Security and Nutrition* to the urban and rural poor throughout the life cycle.
- *Climate Change, Environment, Disaster Risk Reduction and Response* to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable populations and ensure they benefit from natural resource management.
- *Pro-poor Urban Development* to improve living conditions of urban poor.
- *Gender Equality and Women's Advancement* to increase disadvantaged women's participation in wage employment and reduce women's social and institutional vulnerabilities.

I look forward to working with all relevant national stakeholders in the implementation of our UNDAF over the next years.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the words of the Secretary General, who, as many of you may be aware, will visit us here in Bangladesh next month to see first-hand, on-the-ground, the challenges and achievements in the areas of maternal and children's health and in climate change.

By way of introduction to the words of the Secretary General, allow me to mention that the month of October 2011, marks a significant milestone for humanity as we stand on the threshold of a world of 7 billion people. The UN Secretary General is sharing the following message for UN Day 2011, and I **QUOTE**:

Days from now, the human family will welcome its 7 billionth member. Some say our planet is too crowded. I say we are 7 billion strong.

The world has made remarkable progress since the United Nations was born 66 years ago today. We are living longer. More of our children survive. More and more of us live at peace, under democratic rule of law. As we have seen in this dramatic year, people everywhere are standing up for their rights and human freedoms.

And yet, all this progress is under threat; from economic crisis; rising joblessness and inequality; climate change. Around the world, too many people live in fear. Too many people believe their Governments and the global economy can no longer deliver for them. In these turbulent times, there is only one answer: unity of purpose. Global problems demand global solutions. They compel all nations to unite in action on an agenda for the world's people.

That is the very mission of the United Nations: to build a better world; to leave no one behind; to stand for the poorest and most vulnerable in the name of global peace and social justice.

On this special day, let us recognize: never has the United Nations been so needed. In our increasingly interconnected world, we all have something to give and something to gain by working together. Let us unite, 7 billion strong, in the name of the global common good.

UNQUOTE

Honorable Minister,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This global milestone, a world of 7 billion people, presents a challenge, an opportunity, and a call to action. Whether we are all able to live together on a healthy planet will depend on the choices we make and actions we take today.

Currently, approximately 78 million people are added to the global population each year, increasing demand for natural resources and pressure on our planet. While poverty, inequality and increased pressure for resources represent major challenges, the world is also more interconnected than ever before, creating enormous possibilities. But adding 78 million people to the world's population each year also poses tremendous challenges. Reducing inequities and improving living standards for people alive today -- as well as for generations to follow -- will require new ways of thinking and unprecedented global cooperation.

The moment for action is now. As a part of a global movement for all humanity, the "*7 Billion Actions*" Campaign is designed to raise awareness on the opportunities and challenges this milestone presents. Everyone has an opportunity and a responsibility to make a world of 7 billion a better place for us all.

I hope that all of you will join the United Nations in taking forward new ideas for a better future. In fact, as one of the most densely populated countries in the world, Bangladesh is uniquely qualified to play a lead role in the global dialogue on population. Indeed, many of the lessons and good practices emerging from Bangladesh's experiences could help other countries in their efforts to address the opportunities and challenges of a world of 7 billion.

On behalf of the UN System, I would like to reaffirm the UN system's continuing and unreserved commitment to support Bangladesh in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. We stand ready as always to respond to the needs of the Government and the people of this beautiful, culturally and historically rich country which we are privileged to serve.

I hope that I have been able to convey a clear sense of shared values and commitments, of shared challenges and opportunities. Just as important, I hope that today, United Nations day, we can agree to continue to work together, harder than ever, to achieve our shared hopes and aspirations for a safer, more secure and more equitable future.

With this, I wish you all a very happy UN Day. Thank you.