



# High Level Plenary Meeting of the UN

## Statement

By

Her Excellency Begum Khaleda Zia

Prime Minister

People's Republic of Bangladesh

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Mr. President,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Delegates,

At the outset let me state how profoundly shocked we are at the huge toll taken by Hurricane Katrina in the gulf coast of the United States. Natural disasters do not distinguish between rich and poor countries and miseries and sufferings caused to human life are the same. We in Bangladesh have weathered many severe floods and cyclones and the toll in terms of life and property has been huge. We can, therefore, feel the torment that the affected people have undergone and we offer our heartfelt sympathies. We know that the American people can overcome the disaster and move on with their lives.

Mr. President,

We had gathered here five years ago to adopt the Millennium Declaration. We had faith in the document because it reflected the hopes and aspirations of our peoples and also the seriousness with which we wanted to address the issues that confronted us. Today we have an opportunity to review the progress made and also chart the way forward to reach our common goals.

Mr. President,

The Millennium Development Goals are a set of goals to ensure development, peace and security, and human rights for our peoples. We have set for ourselves a target to implement the MDGs by the year 2015. I cannot agree more with the Secretary-General that it is within our means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals; we can halve global poverty and stem

the spread of major diseases, promote gender equality and empower women in 10 years time. Progress in achieving these MDGs may have fallen short of expectations but we are not totally disheartened.

We in Bangladesh have the satisfaction of achieving two MDG targets already, namely removing gender disparity in primary and secondary schools and ensuring access to safe drinking water. Despite numerous constraints, we have made substantive progress in six key socio-economic development areas.

First, we have achieved sustained GDP growth rate of over 5 percent in last 10 years. This is despite floods and other natural disasters that so frequently visit our country.

Second, as living conditions improved, the incidence of poverty fell substantially. Indeed, our record exceeded that of most developing countries. In Bangladesh, the percentage of the poor fell from over 70 percent in 1971 to less than 45 percent in 2002.

Third, improved food security has been achieved during the past few years. From being chronic food-deficit in the 1970s, Bangladesh is now very close to achieving food self-sufficiency.

Fourth, we have enhanced our capacity to better respond to and manage natural disasters. Despite the floods of last year, our GDP growth rate was 5.5 percent as a result of peoples' resilience and prudent and effective post-flood economic measures.

Fifth, there has been a gradual improvement in physical quality of life index achieved through the government's allocation of highest amount of resources to education and health sectors year after year.

Sixth, we have had laudable successes in the key social sectors. Bangladesh has one of the highest primary school enrolment rates in the developing world. Most importantly, we have achieved gender parity in enrolment at the primary and lower secondary levels. Population growth rate has been drastically reduced, falling to 1.47 percent in 2005 from 3 percent in the 1970s. Total fertility rate has dropped by 50 percent from 6.3 to 3 births per woman over the last two decades. Infant mortality has decreased by over 60 percent since 1980. The empowerment of women has also gathered pace. Micro-credit programmes have reached over 12 million people, most of whom are women.

Mr. President,

We have finalised a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) through wide-ranging consultation with all stakeholders. Our strategies include: ensuring participation in economic development of the poor and women; promoting good governance and sound allocation of resources; improving the quality of service delivery to meet basic needs of the people, such as employment, nutrition, education and health; and ensuring sustainable development and environmental balance.

We are at the same time making determined efforts to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure good governance and the rule of law. An Anti-Corruption Commission has been established. The office of Tax Ombudsman has been created. An Independent Human Rights Commission is going to be constituted soon. Separation of the judiciary from the executive is underway. All these initiatives are expected to have a positive impact on our overall socio-economic development.

However, our efforts at the national level will not be sufficient unless a conducive external environment is ensured. We do not wish to remain dependent on external assistance—financial and technical, for ever. In some critical areas, however, ODA is essential at this time for acceleration of economic reforms and lifting the people from abject poverty. We believe that the most important support for our sustained economic growth and development would be enhanced market access for our products, increased foreign direct investment and substantial flow of ODA from our development partners.

Mr. President,

The forces of intolerance, extremism and violence have to be vigorously tackled. Bangladesh's unequivocal condemnation of all forms of terrorism is well known. The root causes that lead to such wayward behaviour must also be addressed. The problems of poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation continue to haunt us. If we do not address these problems effectively now, we will not be able to contain the tensions and violence around us and build a peaceful and just tomorrow.

We also firmly believe that development, peace and security are inter-linked and mutually reinforcing. We maintain that peace around the world can be built and strengthened through enhanced dialogue, tolerance and understanding among the peoples.

Our experience suggests that development, security and human rights goals are best achieved against a backdrop of pluralism, democratic social ethos, greater gender balance and good governance.. We hold the view that these

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values are universal and transcend national boundaries. We welcome the establishment of the Democracy Fund at the United Nations, which we hope would adequately contribute to capacity-building of the Member-States.

Mr. President,

This meeting should provide the necessary impetus to achieve the MDGs. What we need today is firm political will to implement the plans we have already agreed upon. In particular, I appeal to developed countries to fulfill their commitment which is clearly stated in Goal 8 of the MDGs. Let our meeting send a strong signal that we are willing and ready to translate the action plans into reality. Let our gathering be remembered by the posterity as the one that made a difference in their lives.

I thank you all.