



Statement by
H.E. Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh
on *“Education and Gender Equality: “Protecting our girls from violence and
discrimination in education”*
New York, 9 July 2014

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good Morning.

01. Let me start by quoting of a great American leader, an author and a champion of women’s education in the 19th century, Brigham Young. He said and I quote: "You educate a man; you only educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation," unquote. Ladies and gentlemen, Brigham Young’s words of wisdom in the 19th century has become a universal reality of the 21st century and, as we strive hard with only a few months at hand to realize the MDG targets by the 2015 deadline, this quote, appeared to us as a smart economics of the time.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

02. The importance of girls' education has been emphasized in numerous documents but it was in the Millennium Declaration where our leaders put it as a goal that there must be gender parity; equal numbers of girls and boys in every primary school around the world by 2015. 14 years later it seems that those pledges were more realistic than ever, and perhaps even achievable if the world had invested more in girl’s education. During this period significant reduction in the number of out-of-school children has

taken place world-wide as the number has more than halved from 102 million in 2000 to a 57 million in 2011, a ... reduction. The world witnessed commendable progress in many developing countries where governments, the UN and the civil society worked hand in hand to realize not only MDG 2 and 3, but also MDG 4 and 5, all of which are somehow related to girls education, health and empowerment.

03. And yet so much more needs to be done. Regrettably, there are still 57 million children out of school and nearly two thirds of them are girls. 123 million young people still cannot read or write and of them, 70% are women and girls. While many countries including Bangladesh have achieved MDG 3, it is unfortunate that nearly 36 countries have not yet achieved gender parity in primary education.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

04. We all know that an educated woman is an enlightened woman and more importantly, 'an agent of change'. Research shows with evidence that countries promoting and realizing girls' education have higher numbers of educated mothers, tend to have lower maternal and child mortality, better maternal and child health, fewer numbers of childbirth, more women at the work force and business, and more women in politics and policy making. That educated women are more aware of their child's nutrition and health needs and are more likely to access maternal and antenatal health care services. Girls spending time in high school and college are more likely to marry later and to have smaller and healthier families. Additional education adds nearly 10% additional income in the lifespan of an individual and it also helps nation's GDP increment.

05. Secondly, education, formal or vocational, increases a woman's potential to get involved in income generation and thereby grant her economic independence, empowerment and personal freedom.

06. While we all agree the importance of girls' education and women empowerment, there are a number of factors which constrain our efforts in this regard. Poverty, poor infrastructure, lack of knowledge and education, social, religious and traditional superstition, and violence against women and girls are the major impediments.

Dear Friends and colleagues:

07. Under the leadership of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, our government have been pursuing a gender sensitive national development agenda placing education at the center and core of our MDGs policies and programs. Educating every girl in Bangladesh has been a top priority of our government and remains a central plank of our MDGs and also post 2015 development strategy.

08. Our 2010 Education Policy ensured access for all to education that helped us realize MDG 2, almost 100% enrollments at the primary level. To attract more girls to school, girl's education has been made free up to twelfth grade while special stipend only for girls, school feeding program and distribution of free text books have been introduced by Bangladesh government to increase girls' enrollment in higher secondary schools and prevent drop outs and thus enroll more women to graduation levels. No wonder, these sustained and targeted approach helped us to have 53% female students at secondary level vis-a-vis 47% boys now-- a sharp reversal from 35% girls and 65% boys only a few years ago.

A "Prime Minister's Education Assistance Trust Fund Act 2011" has been enacted to ensure education for the poor meritorious students specially

girls. During 2012-13, one hundred thirty-three thousand female students received financial assistance under this trust fund. In earlier days, we had problems in distributing text books. Sometimes it took almost half of the year to ensure free text books to all. But our Government has ensured distribution of free text books to all students on the first day of each year, nearly 930 million books, a gigantic task indeed. Apart from special assistance to female student, the Government is also providing cash and food assistance under different social safety net programs to poor deserving mothers, which ultimately encourage poor parents to send their girls to schools.

09. The present Government is also facilitating higher education for girls and has plans to make girl's education free up to graduation levels provided resources are made available. An International University named the 'Asian University for Women' has been set up and also 3 polytechnic Institutions are running to provide technical and vocational education to female students. Ensuring quality education for girls through digitalization is also at the heart of our vision 2021. Text books are made available online as E-books. Education institutions are increasingly being equipped with laptop and multimedia.

10. In order to address violence against girls in public places and in educational institutions the government has enacted strict laws. For example, Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 and its Amendment were promulgated as a non-bailable Act. The Acid Control Act 2002 and the Acid Crime Prevention Acts 2002 restricted import and sale of acid in open markets. Steps have been taken to prevent sexual

harassment of girls through social awareness raising program all over the country. Mobile Courts are being empowered to take immediate action against eve teasers and offenders of sexual harassment.

11. Our investments in girls' education have started to bring positive returns. We have seen increase in literacy rates, increased enrolment, retention and completion of primary education. Gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary levels, a prime target of MDG-3. 99.47% of our children are now enrolled into primary schools. Dropout rate has been reduced from 48% to 21%, poverty level has been reduced by more than half from 59% to below 26% now, GDP growth rate has been maintained to an average of 6.3% for last 5 years and per capita income increased by 34.6%. Women's participation in labor force has increased to nearly 36% by 2013. Bangladesh has assumed 8th position in political empowerment of women by the global gender gap report of 2012. We have achieved these goals owing to dynamism of its people, leadership commitment, sustained and targeted approaches and more importantly, because of unique cooperation and collaboration between government and non-government agencies in the country plus help from the development partners and UN agencies especially UNESCO, UNICEF, UN Women for their generous support in our national country-owned programs. We, therefore, thankful to all of them.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

13. With MDG deadline fast approaching and with myriad of challenges at hand, we have to act smart and quickly. We need to invest in girls'

education and empowerment of women. I am happy to learn that both empowerment of women and education have featured prominently in the post-2015 discourse and these two issues have been contemplated as possible goals. Indeed, success of any development agenda will depend on active engagement of women as 'agents of change' and education is the tool that will equip women to play that critical role.

I thank you all.