

**Statement by HE Mr. Masud Bin Momen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh
at the discussion event on observing the 'National Genocide Remembrance Day'
Bangladesh Permanent Mission, 25 March 2018**

Excellencies,

Valiant Freedom Fighters of Bangladesh,

Distinguished guests,

Friends and colleagues,

We are grateful for your presence at this discussion event to observe the National Genocide Remembrance Day of Bangladesh. We regret that the day falls on a weekend here, but the kind response we received from our friends in the UN family and genocide scholars from home and abroad encouraged us to proceed with this second official observance of the day.

Our national observance complements the recent decision at the UN to observe 09 December as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. The Day marks the adoption of the International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide in 1948, which Bangladesh is a State Party to.

Despite the international community's resounding 'no' to genocides, the shadow of mass atrocity crimes continues to loom large in different parts of the world. There are still far too many inequities, injustices and multipliers of risks for us to remain complacent about our ability to contain the horrors and atrocities lurking around the corner. The recent events in the Gaza Strip, Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and Rakhine State in Myanmar are some of the most horrifying tragedies we have seen unfolding before our eyes.

Bangladesh experienced an extreme form of genocide during our War of Liberation in 1971. The Pakistani military regime felt morally and politically challenged by the undisputed leadership of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and, in response, opted for ethnic cleansing of the Bengali people in order to preserve their stranglehold on power.

During the nine-month long occupation, three million Bengali civilians were killed, more than 200,000 women were violated and 10 million people were rendered refugees across the border in India and 40 million displaced. A small minority of ideologically motivated local collaborators and auxiliary forces participated and abetted in committing these mass atrocity crimes.

It is somewhat intriguing that Bangladesh's experience of one of the worst genocides since the Holocaust had received rather scant attention in international genocide scholarship until recently. As Professor Adam Jones from the University of British Columbia had observed, and I paraphrase, "The west-centric genocide discourse had relegated the Bangladesh story to the periphery often branding it as a 'civil war, yet ignored to decipher the complex relationship between the Siamese twins of civil war and genocide."

It is encouraging to see that such omission or amnesia is currently in the process of being addressed through the gradual revival of the Bangladesh experience of 1971 in the international genocide scholarship. Thanks to the work being done by some local and international experts, the Bangladesh narrative of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity is making a compelling comeback, especially in the backdrop of our national quest for justice for those crimes.

Indeed, the Bangladesh experience should also make an engaging case study for the long travails our people had to endure to secure justice for the mass atrocities suffered in 1971. Almost four decades since then, in March 2010, the Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina established the International Crimes Tribunal, Bangladesh (CT-BD) to end the culture of impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators, uphold the rule of law and bring justice to the victims and their families traumatized by their experience. In the meantime, we had gathered lessons in the process of establishing and operationalizing the International Criminal Court and from the work done by the International Tribunals for Rwanda and former Yugoslavia, among others.

We are grateful that the people of Bangladesh had never allowed the horrific crimes of 1971 to escape their collective memory, even in an environment of impunity. The painful memories had been passed on from generation to generation. The tribulations suffered by our refugees in 1971 have guided us to play hosts for decades to those fleeing from fear and persecution from Myanmar's Rakhine State, including nearly 700,000 Rohingya who have entered our territory since August 2017. We are now closely working with the UN and other partners to help address the root causes of this crisis in Myanmar, and facilitate the return of the Rohingya in safety and dignity.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has said recently that the latest atrocities against the Rohingya bore unmistakable elements of genocide. The UN Human Rights Council last week adopted a Resolution that reminded the Security Council about the possibility of referring the case of Myanmar to the International Criminal Court and acknowledged the need for considering the establishment of a new independent and impartial investigation mechanism.

I am certain our world can do better than just witness such mass atrocities taking place despite the clear early warning signs. We must react before it is too late. We need to fathom how to prevent genocides and seriously invest in it using the tools we have in the international legal system. We must commit ourselves to give impetus to the Secretary General's ongoing reform initiatives to make the UN act more effectively in conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

We strongly believe that the messages of prevention, prosecution and memorialization of genocides need to be resonated through all regions and continents of the World. As part of its foreign policy pursuits, Bangladesh would remain invested in doing its part in the world stage to drive home the message of 'never, never and never again' in relation to genocides and other mass atrocity crimes.

I thank you all.