



Remarks of H.E. Ambassador Rabab Fatima, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN as co-sponsor to the side-event on “Addressing hate speech and preventing incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence: Synergies within the United Nations system” on 04 February 2020 at 10:00-11:30 am, , CR 3, UNHQs

**Mr. Adama Dieng, Amb. Omar Hilale, Amb. Mariangela Zappia.
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Assalamualaikum and a very good morning to you all.

I am very pleased to join my colleagues Amb. Hilale and Amb. Zappia to co-sponsor today's event to observe the United Nations Inter-Faith Harmony Week. The large presence in the room today, speaks of the importance attached by you all to the subject, and that is indeed very reassuring.

Rise of hate speech, xenophobia, racism and religious intolerance is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time. No country is immune to it. Use of cyber-space has made it more difficult. It is, therefore, very important that we are having this discussion.

Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country. Yet, secularism and freedom of religion are the fundamental principles of our Constitution. We have a sizeable Hindu population as well as Buddhists and Christians, all cohabiting in communal harmony and peace. Any national programme begins with recitation from the holy books of all these major faiths. Perhaps, we are the only country where we have national holidays for major religious festivals of all these religions. Mosques, Temple, Pagoda and Churches are seen quite often side by side. The spirit that defines the interfaith relations in my country is best encapsulated in an oft-quoted statement by my Prime Minister: “ধর্ম যারযার উৎসব সবার” [“Religion is one's own; but festivals are for everyone.”] All religious festivals are celebrated by everyone regardless of the faith they follow.

Distinguished Delegates,

Religious leaders and teachers are held in high esteem in our society. We are leveraging this to guard against misuse of religion and spread of hatred, intolerance and violence in the community. In around 70,000 mosques in the country, the Imams deliver pre-sermon speeches during Friday prayers.

Education is also being used as an important enabler. De-radicalization and counter-terrorism have been included in our school curriculum to imbue young minds. We have a good number of Hindu, Buddhist and Christian civil society organizations and institutions



and our government works closely with them for promoting religious harmony. All these steps have made us stand united against terrorism and violent extremism more than ever before.

Bangladesh witnessed a terrorist incident in July 2016 which shocked the entire nation. This was the first time for the country to witness such a terror attack. The Government not only countered that with decisive actions but also adopted a “zero tolerance” policy to eliminate terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestation. In the aftermath of that incident, we reviewed our counter terrorism (CT) and prevention of violent extremism (PVE) strategy taking up a “whole-of-society” approach. And that involved engaging prominent Muslim clerics to campaign against terrorism and violent extremism. Mass rallies were organized with the participation of leading clerics from all faiths.

A leading Islamic Group in Bangladesh issued a Fatwa (Religious edict) condemning terrorism and militancy including violent attacks on non-Muslims and providing clarity on misinterpretations of the terrorists about Islamic dictums. This Fatwa was signed by 100 thousand Islamic scholars, legal experts and clerics. We brought the Imam of that Islamic Group to UN to share his experience and he had fruitful engagements with the UN Office on Genocide Prevention.

In view of the global trend of abuse of digital platforms to spread hatred and incite violence exploiting religious sentiment, Bangladesh enacted the ‘Digital Security Act 2018’. It criminalizes any such publication or broadcast on digital platforms.

At the multilateral front, Bangladesh is one of the founding members of GCERF. We volunteered, as one of the first pilot beneficiary countries, to implement projects with GCERF funding which were aimed at strengthening resilience against violent extremist agendas. We are also a member of Group of Friends on prevention of violent extremism. Our signature resolution in the UNGA on Culture of Peace promotes inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue at the UN particularly involving the youth. This notion can significantly complement the two Plans of Action we are discussing today.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to reiterate a few points.

First, we need wider dissemination of the Plans of Action and more thematic deliberations to bring the issue in UN mainstream discussion round the year. Apart from Interfaith Week, there should be regular events in New York, Geneva and in various capitals to disseminate the important elements of the Plans of Action.



Second, sustained and effective use of electronic and social media platform is critical. This would not only require narrative preparation but also technical edge to be ahead of the race vis-à-vis the hate mongers. Capacity building of national governments is, therefore,

imperative, and so is the need for a multilateral normative and regulatory framework in this regard. The Plans of Action and relevant initiatives provide a good basis that could lead to a regulatory framework eventually.

Third, the Plans of Action provide a good coupling between member states and the UN system. The Plans of Action and other relevant UN documents enjoy lot of complementarities. We need to map these complementarities and build synergies.

Fourth, the new generation of UN country teams needs to work more closely with all national stakeholders particularly the host communities to pick up the early warning signs from the ground for timely action. The Rosenthal Report has brought out the inadequacy of UN's response despite having the early warnings in the case of Myanmar where orchestrated hate speech campaign against Rohingyas has been a major reason behind the Rohingya crisis. We do not want to see such repetitions.

Fifth, a multi-stakeholder and multi-pronged strategy is to be taken up to equip religious actors with relevant knowledge and expertise. We need to build networks of religious leaders both within and outside the national borders creating a resounding "pool of voice".

Last, but most importantly, is political goodwill. This will be critical to push for inclusive and people-centric development, rule of law and upholding human rights which are critical enablers of peace and harmony, also for building resilience against hatred and violence.

In conclusion, the initiatives as outlined under the Plans of Action should lead to some concrete outcomes. We all should be working towards that end. And today's panel gives much hope for such multi-stakeholder partnership and collaboration. Bangladesh stands ready in supporting initiatives like this.

I thank you for your kind attention.