**Press Release**

**World Autism Awareness Day 2021 observed in the UN**

**New York, 06 April, 2021:**

On the occasion World Autism Awareness Day 2021, Bangladesh Permanent Mission, along with the Permanent Missions of Brazil, Kuwait, Poland, Qatar and Korea, UN DESA and Autism Speaks organized a virtual roundtable titled ‘Autism at the Covid-19 Pandemic: How Technology Can Support Equitable Global Response and Recovery’.

Ms. Saima Wazed, the Chairperson of the National Advisory Committee on Autism and Neuro-developmental Disorder, Bangladesh and WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Autism in South-East Asia Region, attended the event as a panelist. Ms Saima Wazed shared good practices from Bangladesh in supporting children with autism and their families during the pandemic, including through targeted support measures and use of ICTs.

'The children with autism and their families suffered disproportionately due to disruptions in their education and therapeutic services during the pandemic. However, in Bangladesh the existing social support system, strong ICT infrastructure and robust community-based health services helped many families cope up with the challenges' she added. Referring to the increased awareness on autism, she said that ‘during the last seven years the National Advisory Committee on Autism in Bangladesh has worked together with various stakeholders, ministries and departments to mitigate the challenges and stigma faced by the persons with autism and other neuro-developmental disorders.” Ms. Saima Wazed referred to the social challenges and stigma that the families face in many societies including Bangladesh and highlighted how positive changes have been brought about in Bangladesh through sustained awareness raising and information sharing.

The event was co-chaired by Ambassador Rabab Fatima, permanent representative of Bangladesh to the UN along with the Permanent Representative of Qatar. In her welcome remarks, Ambassador Rabab Fatima thanked the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her leadership and commitment in addressing the challenges of the persons with autism and also commended the endeavors undertaken by the government in this regard. “In Bangladesh, we have put in place strong legislations and programmes to protect people with disabilities and neuro development disorders. And this includes support and learning centres across the country, and other referral services, including disability inclusive e-services”, she added.

Bangladesh’s PR underscored the need of more investment for research and development of new technologies to support individuals with autism disorder, especially during the pandemic. “We must bridge the digital divide, so that technologies could be made available to, and accessible by all, regardless of their social or economic status” she further added.

Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and International Affairs of UNDESA framed the issues at the event. Along with Ms Saima Wazed, other distinguished panelists from different parts of the world including speakers with autism spoke at the Roundtable Panel Discussion segment. The virtual event was widely attended by people from all corners of the globe including people with autism.

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