**Press Release**

**World Autism Awareness Day 2022 observed in the UN**

**Foreign Minister Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen reiterated Bangladesh’s commitment to ensure maximum**

**use of the talents of autistic people and their full participation in society.**

**New York, 07 April, 2022:**

**“**We reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that over 75 million autistic people in the world can make the most of their talents and participate fully in our societies” said Dr. A. K. Abdul Momen, MP, the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh, today, at the UN. He was delivering his opening remarks at an virtual event on World Autism Awareness Day 2022 organized by the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh and the State of Qatar to the United Nations in New York, in collaboration with the World Health Organization and Autism Speaks.

Dr. Momen 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. In this context, he said, “During Covid-19, the children with autism and their families suffered disproportionately due to disruptions in their education and therapeutic services. However, the existing social support system, strong ICT infrastructure and robust community-based health services in Bangladesh helped many families cope up with the challenges”.

Referring to the increased awareness on autism in Bangladesh, the Foreign Minister said, “Various stakeholders, ministries and departments have worked together to mitigate the challenges and stigma faced by the persons with autism”. In this regards he mentioned various initiatives undertaken by the current government such as ‘Rights and Protection of Persons with Disabilities Act 2013’ and ‘Neuro-development Trust Act 2013’, etc.

“Our government has been promoting a ‘culture of innovation’ to take advantage of the assistive tools and technologies. ‘Digital Bangladesh’ initiative has opened a new era in extending disability inclusive e-service, webs and other ICT-based services”, the Foreign Minister further added.

Dr. Momen also stated that besides national efforts, Bangladesh had been advocating the issue in the UN since the launching of “World Autism Awareness Day” in 2007 and tabled UNGA Resolution 67/82 titled “Addressing the socioeconomic needs of individuals, families and societies affected by ASD, neurodevelopment disorders and associated disabilities” in 2013 which was unanimously adopted.

He mentioned about the guidance of directives given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for mainstreaming all children with special needs in Bangladesh to explore their hidden talents and acknowledged with appreciation the extraordinary role played by 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, to raise awareness on autism in Bangladesh and south Asia.

Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister hoped that society can change to allow autistic people to live their best life and use of inclusive digital technology could be a starting point towards that end.

Along with Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister, Ms. Mariam Bint Ali Bin Nasser Al-Misnad, Minister of Social Development and Family of the State of Qatar; Ms. Melissa Fleming, Under-Secretary-General for Global communications, UN; Ms. Daniela Bas, Director, DISD, DESA, United Nations, and Werner Obermeyer, Director, WHO Office in New York also participated and spoke in the opening segment.

Distinguished panelists from different parts of the world including parents of autistic persons spoke at the Panel Discussion segment. In addition to panel discussions, a Q&A session was held for parents and family members of persons with autism.

The virtual event was widely attended by people including persons with autism from all corners of the globe.

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