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### **Bangladesh Ambassador's Statement**

Good afternoon Congressman Hultgren, Congressman McGovern and all of the distinguished members of this commission and the panel and the audience.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share Bangladesh's record on human rights, a record we are proud of. As you know, Bangladesh won its independence from Pakistan in a brutal war of liberation in 1971, where Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators slaughtered 3 million people and violated more than two hundred thousand women in a genocide.

During the war, more than 10 million of our people sought refuge in India. We know what it means to be a displaced people. This is why we so humanely opened our border to the Rohingyas last year. You may not be aware of this, but prior to August 2017, there were already hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas living in Bangladesh. Beginning in August, Rohingya began fleeing Myanmar military oppression in Rakhine state, which borders southeastern Bangladesh.

700,000 Rohingya took shelter in Bangladesh from August to December of 2017, which is the fastest exodus in the recent history. The government of Bangladesh responded immediately, creating camps with temporary housing, providing food and medical help and safe water. Working with the generous aid of international agencies, Bangladesh redoubled its efforts by allocating more of its land for camps, constructing more-permanent housing and providing more food, drinking water and hygiene facilities. The government initiated biometric registration that allowed every Rohingya having access to essential services. The government immunized Rohingya children. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina – once a political refugee from her own country – received international praise, including from Pope Francis.

While the government of Bangladesh is handling the biggest, most concentrated, most dire human rights crisis in the world with one hand, it is trying on the other hand to maintain stability in the society despite attacks on citizens by Bangladesh Nationalist

Party (BNP) and its violent ally Jamaat-e Islami (not a registered political party). Prior to Bangladesh's 2014 national election, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP, looked at the polling data and concluded it stood little chance at the voting booth. People of Bangladesh recognized and appreciated Awami League party policies that have helped grow the economy, broadened women's education and participation in the workforce, increased life-span and reduced infant mortality.

Because BNP knew its policies would fail in the marketplace of ideas, it turned toward disruption and violence. BNP called nationwide strikes aimed at crippling the economy. But it did more than that. Acting with the extremist Jamaat-e-Islami, a terrorist organization, railway tracks were uprooted, and trains were attacked. Awami League offices were destroyed. Streets were blocked with burning tires. Awami League officials were hacked to death in broad daylight. Buses full of people – of children – were firebombed. The world has seen photos of some of the victims of the BNP and Jamaat firebombing (petrol bombing). They are not easy to look at.

As we near another national election this year, the BNP is again attempting to stir violence and spread lies, some of which are being offered as facts at forums like this one. This was evident in the violent actions of identified BNP activists, who brutally beaten-up members of police force and set fire to their vehicles, just two days ago in Dhaka. The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is determined to take stern actions against violent activities by any one including party activists. As the government is preparing to hold a free and fair elections, it recently engaged in dialogue with different political parties and alliances, following that all registered political parties decided to participate in the upcoming national elections scheduled on 30 December 2018. The independent election commission has also been engaged with all political parties to hold the next parliamentary elections in a free and fair manner with maximum participation of political parties. Bangladesh welcomes international observers to come and observe the elections.

In August this year, following the tragic death of two students in a traffic accident, hundreds of thousands of students, dressed in school uniforms, took to the streets in Dhaka demanding that their government improve road safety. The government listened and agreed to all of their demands. But that wasn't the end of the story. Opposition and extremist agitators collected school uniforms from the shelves of stores and dressed as students. Thus disguised, they began committing acts of violence in the demonstrations, forcing the police to intervene. This fact – and it is a fact – was almost never reported in the Western media, which mischaracterized the situation as police violently cracking down on peaceful student protestors.

Were members of the opposition party arrested at a higher rate than members of the ruling party? Absolutely, but because they were the ones committing the violence. During these protests, Bangladeshi photojournalist Shahidul Alam was arrested. He and

the Western media claimed he was arrested because he gave an interview critical of the government. This is not true. Each day, articles and news broadcasts that criticize the Prime Minister and the government appear all over Bangladesh and abroad. Alam was arrested because he falsely claimed on Facebook that government-affiliated “goons” were “beating up students.” He alleged rapes and murders of student protesters. All of this was patently untrue. In addition, because of his eminent status and online influence, his inflammatory words incited a mob that descended on an Awami League party headquarter and attacked workers there. As a result, one Awami League official was permanently blinded in one eye.

The government is committed to preventing violence in Bangladesh. That’s why we have written laws that forbid the use of social media for inciting violence, spreading hate speech and insulting others’ religions. Because Bangladesh is a secular government and a multicultural society, the government has taken these actions to protect religious and ethnic minorities in the country who have overwhelmingly been the targets of online and social media bullying, harassment and attacks. But instead of receiving praise for trying to protect its citizens, the government of Bangladesh was criticized for restricting free speech. That is untrue and unfair.

Bangladesh does not dispute the fact that some members of its police force have acted beyond their legal authority during the ongoing crackdown on drug dealing and violence. But these officers have or are being punished and removed from the force. Blaming an entire police force for the inappropriate acts of a few makes no more sense than impugning the reputation of the whole force who were and are working hard day in and day out to protect the citizens.

Operations of law enforcement agencies against identified drug dealers resulted in deaths of some hard-core criminals. These are described as so called “extra-judicial killings” by our western friends. But, in reality, these deaths occurred when law enforcement agencies went to apprehend the drug dealers and, in some cases, were compelled to respond to attacks by the criminals. However, if there was any act of criminalities by the members of law enforcement agencies, due legal and administrative measures are being pursued and the government is punishing the offenders as per the laws of the land.

Likewise, the so-called disappearances of some citizens have nothing to do with government actions. Some of those who have “disappeared” have turned up later. It appears that many of them were running away from the law enforcers who are legitimately seeking to arrest them for serious crimes. Some might have gone into hiding to avoid huge social embarrassment due to personal and financial wrong-doings. The authorities are investigating the case of alleged disappearances and trying their best to find those

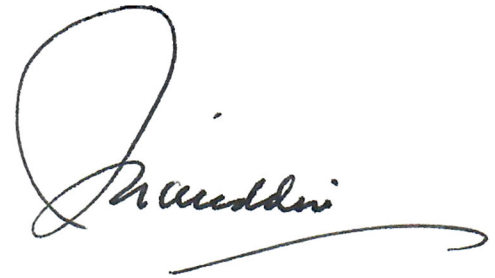
who have been reported lost. Critics are distorting the facts, as usual, particularly before a national election. Nothing more.

Bangladesh has one of the world's fastest-growing economies and has risen to lower-middle income status in the World Bank rankings. Indeed, it has become a global development success story and model for lower-income countries.

Unlike some other countries, this growth has not come at the expense of liberty. Every Bangladeshi is free to participate in civil society and to make his or her voice heard, as long as that right does not infringe on others' rights or safety. Undergirding Bangladesh's remarkable growth story is a firm commitment to justice and rule of law. Bangladesh would not allow the perpetrators of the 1971 genocide to escape justice – an issue that was looming extremely large in the psyche of the nation for far too long. The nation must free itself from this deep scar once for all.

Bangladesh's commitment to the rule of law means that it will not close its eyes to those who turn violent for any reason, political or otherwise. Being a member of an opposition party – or for that matter the governing party – doesn't permit anyone to be above the law. Bangladesh believes in human rights and works very hard to uphold them. It also lives by the rule of law. Two facts that deserve praise and not false criticism.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ziauddin', with a large, elegant flourish extending from the end of the signature.

(Mohammad Ziauddin)  
Ambassador