

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-883-7150-4

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: DhakaPA@state.gov

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



**SPEECH BY AMBASSADOR MORIARTY AT THE
LAUNCHING CEREMONY: NATIONAL FOOD POLICY
PLAN OF ACTION**

Thursday, May 28, 2009

Honorable Minister for Agriculture, Begum Matia Chowdhury, Honorable Minister for Food and Disaster Management, Dr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Secretary of the Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Mr. Md. Mokhlesur Rahman, Government officials, Development Partners, Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen:

Assalam-u-Alaikum and good morning.

It is a pleasure to take part in this important event. Food security is of paramount importance. With a population of 150 million people in an area of 60,000 square miles, Bangladesh is one of the world's most densely populated countries. At the same time, available agricultural land shrinks by an average of one percent per year due to river erosion, soil salinization, urban growth and climate change. Without a doubt, ensuring food security for Bangladesh's citizens is one of the country's biggest challenges.

The Food Policy Plan of Action we are launching today is a key initiative of the Government of Bangladesh. It has the full support of the United States and other development partners. It aims to assist the country's neediest citizens. The Plan identifies responsibilities for partners in implementing the National Food Policy and recommends standards for tracking progress and measuring food security success.

The Ministry of Food and Disaster Management's Food Policy Management Unit, with extensive inter-ministerial support, produced the plan of action being implemented today. The outstanding collaboration has built a strong foundation to address this complex and important public policy issue. Continued collaboration will ensure food security in Bangladesh over the coming years.

I commend the Government of Bangladesh for its efforts to achieve food security thus far. The government already implemented a wide range of successful policies and programs that increase food

availability, enhance food purchasing power and ensure adequate nutrition. In spite of these improvements and greater grain availability, food security remains a challenge. Too many Bangladeshis continue to live below the established food-based poverty line.

As many as 30 million Bangladeshis live in extreme poverty and are continuously undernourished. Experts estimate that at least 60 million Bangladeshis lack sufficient food at least six to seven months per year. These households do not consume three meals a day, do not consume 2,100 kilocalories a day per family member, and do not consume a balanced household diet. Children who are malnourished during their first two years of life may suffer permanent developmental disabilities. An alarming 43% of all children in the country are stunted. This state of chronic severe malnutrition threatens to deny Bangladesh its full national potential. Bangladesh's human capital, its people, cannot achieve their natural capacity or potential due to chronic low nutrition. Food security affects people's lives today but robs children of the bright future which they deserve.

Reducing chronic malnutrition and ensuring food security are top priorities for development in Bangladesh. The United States and our collaborating partners are proud to support Bangladesh as it launches this important plan.

The Plan of Action, with its detailed objectives and identified interventions, is the road map to address food insecurity. To succeed, the Plan of Action cannot sit on a shelf. The government must implement the Plan to set conditions that pull people out of poverty. Each person must have a sufficient food basket with the proper balance of micro-nutrients, calories, proteins, and carbohydrates. Each family deserves proper nutrition necessary to prevent energy deficiency, anemia, low birth weight, birth defects, and unhealthy mothers. Bangladesh deserves a strong, healthy, and productive work force.

The National Food Policy Action Plan is a tangible example of how development partners can work together to achieve a greater good. The project is an important landmark in focusing concrete action to food security expansion. While the Bangladesh Government has now broadened the food policy framework in all dimensions -- food access, food availability, and nutrition -- the real challenge lies ahead - effective implementation.

Food security issues cut across sector boundaries. Just as there is a need for multiple donors, NGOs and others to work together to address food security concerns, there is also a need for improved coordination across the government to achieve success. This coordination has already begun with the inter-ministerial drafting of the National Food Policy Plan of Action. I encourage you to continue to

develop and implement this road map in an integrated fashion through active participation of all food security-related ministries and organizations.

I am pleased that the government has enthusiastically endorsed the National Food Policy Plan of Action by designating the Plan as an official document and ensuring broad country-wide distribution. Broader circulation will greatly increase awareness, accountability and continuous commitment and accelerate the implementation of the National Food Policy.

My Government, through USAID, stands ready to assist the people and government of Bangladesh in implementing the Plan of Action. We thank our partners, the European Commission and the Food and Agricultural Organization, for their collaboration in implementing this critical new plan.

Today's launching ceremony emphasizes that we can achieve great things when we work together. Broad awareness will help secure national ownership of the Food Policy Plan of Action. We wish Bangladesh every success in implementing this Plan to help realize our common goal - food security and a brighter tomorrow for all Bangladeshis.

Thank You.

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