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REMARKS BY

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EDWARD M. KENNEDY CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE ARTS

RECEPTION FOR POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTORS

EMK CENTER

September 27, 2013

Good evening, everyone, and welcome...

I have been thinking about SM Sultan ... do you know him?

He is one of the greatest Bangladeshi artists of all time ... he's the guy who painted Bangladeshis to look like superhuman musclemen ... all looking like Arnold Schwarzenegger.

For fifteen years I puzzled over those odd paintings ... I just couldn't figure them out.

But a couple of months ago, all of a sudden a light came on, and I instantly understood what Sultan was trying to convey ... he painted those crazy musclemen figures to depict the greatness of the Bangladeshi people ... even though he painted during a time of famine and hardship in Bangladesh, Sultan saw the inherent greatness of the Bangladeshi people.

I share that vision ... I, too, see the inherent greatness of the wonderful people of Bangladesh.

But greatness cannot be taken for granted ... it must be nurtured ... nurtured so it blossoms into great deeds that transform the nation.

Such is the work of the Edward M. Kennedy Center for Public Service and the Arts ... the EMK Center is an engine that drives greatness, that nurtures greatness, that grows greatness ... I call it an incubator of greatness.

A year ago this month, I helped open the EMK Center ... at that time, we shared our vision that the Center, located in the heart of Dhaka's university district and surrounded by tens of university students, would be a place where ideas are born, where ideas are debated and refined and brought to life.

I am pleased to report that those lofty visions have been realized ... and then some. The EMK Center is a happening place ... over the past twelve months more than 60,000 people have coursed through these doors, many participating in the over 1000 programs and activities that were carried out here. So much is happening here ... programs tied to human rights awareness, education, youth leadership, women's empowerment, business development, to name just a few.

Creative, innovative, dynamic programs ... programs led by young people for young people ... , programs that aim to build leaders for today and tomorrow, programs that aim to effect change both today and tomorrow.

Programs ... like Volunteer for Bangladesh's Live Well Campaign that teaches nutrition, sanitation and disease awareness to thousands around the nation ... programs like the master classes taught by the world-renown American dance company, Spectrum Dance Theater, to help budding Bangladeshi dancers hone their skills ... programs like the EMK Think Tank, which has featured international speakers from Time Magazine, National Geographic, Microsoft among others, who assessed the life and times of today and the prospects for tomorrow.

I could go on for a long time listing the programs and activities that go on here, but I think I've made my point ... but you don't have to take my word for it ... we invited tonight a few of the young leaders who are working with programs associated with the EMK Center ... could you raise your hands so folks can identify you ... thanks.

... and we have an exciting new venture that will burst on the stage in a couple of weeks: Startup Bangladesh. This exciting entrepreneurship initiative will connect young Bangladeshi entrepreneurs with business mentors, including Bangladeshi-Americans. This program will help entrepreneurs launch startups in a range of industries by providing training, mentoring and competitive access to seed funding and angel investors. Startup Bangladesh will play a critical role in linking Bangladeshi entrepreneurs with the experience and resources of successful businessmen and women in Bangladesh and in America.

I have tried to share with you a glimpse of the EMK Center so you can better understand why I and many others are so excited about the emerging role that the Center is playing in developing Bangladeshi greatness.

As you can well imagine, this continuing success has a cost. I seek to build a public-private partnership that will enable this good work to continue and grow. The U.S. Government has agreed ... even in this time of shrinking budgets ... to support the platform, the base, this facility ... but I need help with supporting the programming that goes on here ... afterall, that is where is the rubber hits the road.

So, that is my appeal to each of the companies represented here tonight ... to ask yourself whether you believe in and want to support the youth leadership and women empowering programs of the EMK Center ... ask yourself whether you want to contribute to nurturing the greatness of Bangladeshi youth and women ... ask yourself whether the exciting programming of the EMK Center is consistent with your Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.

For our part, we ... the American government and our wonderful partner the Liberation War Museum ... promise you maximum bang for each buck or taka you contribute; we promise you full accountability for your contribution; and we promise to provide you a report on the impact of your contributions.

As I close, I wish to thank those companies that have already contributed. I deeply appreciate your most generous contributions.

Thank you.

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**Prepared for delivery*