

**UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS  
WENDY SHERMAN**

**AMBASSADOR DAN MOZENA**

**FOREIGN MINISTER SHAHIDUL HAQUE**

**PRESS CONFERENCE**

**DHAKA, BANGLADESH**

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**Under Secretary Sherman:** Thank you. It's very wonderful to be here today, and in addition to those on my delegation named, Assistant Secretary Jose Fernandez, our Assistant Secretary for Economic and Business Affairs who is all over the front page of your newspapers from his work yesterday is here with us as well.

I could not have a better partner for this Partnership Dialogue than Foreign Secretary Haque. It has been an honor to work with him, and as you can tell from the statement that was read out, we covered an extraordinary range of topics. It speaks to the deep, broad and quite comprehensive relationship between the United States and Bangladesh and the depth that we are achieving after only two dialogues.

We were remarking how the working groups met yesterday on each of the topics that the Foreign Secretary mentioned and the working groups actually did an enormous amount of work and came to the plenary session today with quite detailed reports of ways in which we can work together, further deepen our efforts, not only bilaterally, but regionally and on world affairs as well.

Bangladesh is becoming more and more a regional and global player. Bangladesh sits at the center of a very dynamic region and sits at the center both as a strong and vibrant democracy, a country with economic growth, and a country with much to offer its neighbors.

So I'm delighted to be here.

I want to stop for one moment and note that the Foreign Secretary took a moment at the beginning of our dialogue of silence for all of the victims, those who lost their lives and the families who are trying to survive through the difficulties, of both Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions.

When this was on television the entire American public was as glued to the television set as probably your citizens were. We were astonished by the tragedy. We were buoyed by the

extraordinary courage of the young woman who survived for 17 days, and seemed to be emblematic of the will and the resilience of Bangladesh to not only survive such a tragedy but to thrive and to see it as a transformational moment where in fact the issues that your country has faced with labor rights, with buyer safety, with building codes, this is the moment that the government in the lead along with the business sector, labor and consumers, with support from the international community, can really make a difference and ensure that the very strong brand that is Bangladesh will continue forever and even get better.

Finally, I want to note that Bangladesh is coming up on an election and it is wonderful to see the vibrancy of your democracy, and we look forward to an inclusive, free, fair and credible election.

With that, I will stop so you get to ask your questions. Thank you.

**Shamim Ahsan:** Thank you, Your Excellency.

I recognize the presence of Mr. Jose Fernandez, distinguished Assistant Secretary, bureau of economic and business affairs.

Ladies and gentlemen, now the floor will be open for your interaction. Before we go to the interaction, my request would be that your questions be very brief and you introduce yourself.

**Question:** I'm Serajul Quadir, I work for Reuters.

Just after seeing Rana Plaza collapse, the reaction or response from the U.S. government. And also do you think that it might have some debilitating effect on the GSP calculation?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** The immediate response from the American government and the American people was one of grieving with you and wanting to do whatever we could on a humanitarian basis to be of support to you. The Ambassador was very engaged. I remember getting video of the Ambassador along with colleagues at a blood bank, making sure that we were making a quite concrete contribution to helping in the recovery.

Today I gave two awards to two young people who helped in the rescue effort and helped people to get jobs in the aftermath. There is an enormous, enormous depth of young leadership in this country. We want to recognize that leadership and encourage that kind of civic responsibility that is so prevalent here in Bangladesh.

As far as the GSP decision is made, that is its own process. That decision will come sometime in June and we will see where it goes.

**Question:** Madame Under Secretary, my name is Kabir Bhuiya, I work for the Independent, it's a daily.

I would like to know, following the Partnership Dialogue, is the prospective of continuation of

GSP for Bangladeshi products is now better than before? And did you guys talk about the proposed TICFA Agreement? And when are we going to get it signed?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** Again, on GSP that is a decision that has its own process. It's taking place in Washington. It will be decided sometime in June. That's all I have to say about it today.

On TICFA, we would very much look forward to that. We think this is a way to further deepen our relationship and I'm happy to let Assistant Secretary Fernandez add to that if he would like to. He said that was quite adequate.

So it's something that we would look forward to very much and we are working to that end.

**Question:** When are they going to get it signed?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** We're working on it, and both governments are committed to deep economic integration.

I think what the Foreign Secretary said today was very important. This business forum was the first time we had done it. It went on very well. People want it to continue. We also talked about trade and investment in all the ways that we should be doing work together. TICFA is one mechanism for deepening that relationship, but we have many mechanisms for doing so and I would say every day our Assistant Secretary has been here I now think for three days. That says a lot about how much we have to discuss and how much we are doing together.

**Question:** I am Shamim Ahmad, work for New Age. What's the basis of your optimism as you said after the meeting with the Foreign Minister that the upcoming election in Bangladesh would be free, fair, and inclusive particularly when the two parties are fighting for the modality of the interim government? And when are you going to meet with the leader of the opposition?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** I've not met with the Prime Minister yet either. I will meet with the Prime Minister later on this afternoon.

My optimism is because I have seen what Bangladesh has done since independence. Every turn of the wheel Bangladesh has chosen democracy and has chosen to make progress towards an even stronger and better democracy. The United States democracy is more than 200 years old, yet we still strive every year to get better, to make our own election process more credible, more inclusive, make sure that no one gets turned away, that our politics, as brutal as they can be sometimes, in fact are not violent and that we treat each other with respect and that each voter knows that they are free to go to the election booth, cast their ballot, and that it is a very important thing to do because individual voters do make a difference.

So it is our hope that this occurs. This is a choice that Bangladesh has continued to make. We hope in this cycle they make it one more time. I would note that when I arrived yesterday, there

was a Hartal underway, and although the United States believes very strongly that people should be able to march, demonstrate, speak their minds, we do not believe that violence is acceptable in a democratic society as a way to make your political views known.

**Question:** Madame, my name is Raheed Ejaz, I work for the Prothom Alo, a Bengali daily. The earlier statement issued by Foreign Office yesterday mentioned that during the meeting you discussed about the improvement of the labor rights but not the retailer cost of the industry. And also in the opening statement the Honorable Foreign Secretary mentioned that he also discussed about the better work program. And also you have trust upon retailer conference, if I am not wrong that was floated by Bangladesh side.

So can you just elaborate?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** Sure. Let me say something and then the Foreign Secretary may as well because this is an issue which we have spent some time discussing.

I did a roundtable earlier today with government officials, labor, workers groups, business, private sector and associations because everyone has a role to play in solving this problem and ensuring that tragedy does not visit Bangladesh ever again. Ever again.

There is much that each partner must do to ensure this. In 1911 the United States had its own tragedy. It was called the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. And we only lost 129, I believe it was, people at the time, but it was considered a monumental tragedy. It shocked the nation. And as a result of that we changed everything we did. We created building codes. We got inspectors. We changed our regulatory framework. We allowed free association and labor rights in a way we had not before. It was transformational. We hope that that is the case here in Bangladesh as well.

All of the partners play a role, but at the end of the day citizens expect governments to take the lead role. The Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Minister and I'm sure the Prime Minister, will assure me that that is indeed the case and there are plans that are being put in place and already begun to be implemented.

This is hard to sustain, but in order to solve the problem, one must sustain the effort to get to the result that every worker every day deserves to make sure that they have a safe work place and that they can support their families and their futures.

Mr. Secretary?

**Masud Karim:** Madam Under Secretary, do you have anything to say on the election and government in Bangladesh which is uncertain so far. Both parties didn't agree on a platform that how the election will be conducted in government rule. So what are your comments?

And also the safety in the garment industry, what we were talking about, do they have any

compelling recommendation on the buyer side, that the buyers have any role to play? We are looking there the United States buyers, U.S. buyers are not signing the deal for the welfare though the European Union have already sign.

**Under Secretary Sherman:** Thank you.

On your election and how it proceeds, that's really a decision for Bangladesh. For you to sort out how to get to your elections and how to make sure they continue the democratic tradition that has begun here and has deepened here in Bangladesh. We will support you in every way we can that's appropriate, as you make your own decisions about your own destiny. I'm sure that the people of Bangladesh will I hope in peaceful ways make their views known and urge the parties to in fact proceed forward to an election. But that's your choice.

On the labor issues, absolutely, buyers have a very critical role, must be engaged. They were at the table, in our roundtable today. Assistant Secretary Fernandez both here and in Washington and in fact the Foreign Secretary came to Washington for a round of meetings just a few days ago. And we will continue to work in every way to get the buyers to come to the table in every appropriate way to plan the part that they must for a sustainable solution.

**Question:** I am Naznin Akhter. I work for a Bengali newspaper, Janakantha.

My question is to Madame Under Secretary. You have come on such a time when three Jamaat leaders have sentenced with death. What is your evaluation about it? And because you know in 1971 enormous crimes committed here and the maximum people of Bangladesh are very much want to see the message. Thank you.

**Under Secretary Sherman:** The United States is always for the rule of law and justice, and I know that Ambassador Mozena wants to make a comment on this.

**Ambassador Mozena:** Thank you very much.

We believe that those who have committed atrocities should be held accountable. We believe they should be held accountable by a process that is fair and transparent and consistent with international and domestic standards, including the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights.

**Question:** This is Zahir, I work for NTV, a private Television.

The first thing is on the good governance segment, did you discuss it with the Human Rights situation in Bangladesh? Specially, the political rights which has been dubbed a little bit, and the freedom of assembly is being curbed.

The other question is, what are the reasons behind your canceling your appointment with the leader of the oppositon?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** Let me take the last part of our question first. As I noted when I arrived yesterday, there was a Hartal which I regret. And there have been changes to my schedule that were unavoidable, so that required me to make some changes as to who I could see and where there was time.

In terms of human rights, this is a conversation which we had with each other in a transparent and forthright manner. Deputy Assistant Secretary Karen Hanrahan from our Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor has joined us both in the working groups and in our plenary session today, and we are both back and forth with each other. Very straight-forward about insuring that the democracy in both of our countries continues to strengthen and improve on all of these dimensions.

**Shamim Ahsan:** Thank you very much. I think we are running against time. One question --

**Faridur Rahman Pantho:** Madame Under Secretary, I have a very short question, I'm getting back to the GSP issue. There are many critics in Bangladesh who say that GSP is a bargain to TICFA treaty. Would you please comment?

**Under Secretary Sherman:** These are each individual processes that are not linked to each other. And we will consider both and work through both with Bangladesh. We have a long relationship, one that is growing and deepening as we saw with the Partnership Dialogue that we have had over the last couple of days, that we carry on all throughout the year. We find many ways to work with each other to deepen our relationship and I'm sure that will continue to be the case.

Thank you.

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