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REMARKS BY

**U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
JOURNALIST AND CIVIL SOCIETY EXPERIENCE
SHARING WORKSHOP
SUBMITTING INFORMATION REQUESTS UNDER THE
RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT**

**RUPOSHI BANGLA HOTEL, DHAKA
MAY 29, 2012**

The Honorable A.K. Azad, Minister for Information and Cultural Affairs

The Honorable Ahmed Ataul Hakeem, Comptroller of the Auditor General

The Honorable Ghulam Harman, Chairman of the Anti-corruption Commission

Information Commissioner Mr. Abu Taher

Convener of the Right to Information Forum Ms. Shaheen Anam

Distinguished representatives of civil society and the media, ladies and gentlemen

Asalaam m'laikum and good morning.

Light is a wonderful thing.

As each of us navigates through the challenges of life, light is essential to keep us from stumbling, from falling over into the abyss ... a well-lighted way is the safest way, the best way, as my throbbing big toe earlier this week reminded me all too well of the perils of proceeding through the dark without light, as I had done, leading to an unpleasant encounter with a large chair ...

I love light ... as do you, I suspect, or you likely would not be at this workshop.

But not everyone does ...

In America, in Bangladesh and, likely, in every country, there are those who love the dark, dark places, places where they can hide corruption, criminality, incompetence, ineptness, laziness ...

In all countries, agents of government, whether at national, district or local level, bear a special responsibility, a special trust to use their positions and their access to resources provided by the citizens to good purpose, to help improve the well-being of the people.

Many civil servants do just that as they honorably serve the very people to whom they ultimately are accountable.

Sadly, there are some in government ... be it in America, Bangladesh or elsewhere ... who shirk this responsibility, who use their public office not to promote the general welfare, but rather for their personal gain.

This is a perversion of governance. In America, few days will pass without some revelation of corruption by someone violating the public trust. Similarly, in Bangladesh scarcely a day will pass without the media alleging another abuse of power and authority by a public servant. Just a week ago, the Honorable Finance Minister declared that high level corruption and absence of rule of law are two major hurdles in establishing good governance in Bangladesh.

I believe light is the best tool for ferreting out the corrupt, incompetent and lazy.

In America, we utilize the Freedom of Information Act as a tool to extract information from government to enable the governed to assess for themselves whether those charged with governance are in fact doing so to the satisfaction of those governed, of those who, in a democracy, hold the ultimate power.

The American experience has demonstrated clearly that information, access to information is essential to the vitality and effectiveness of democracy.

I believe the same holds true in Bangladesh.

I believe Bangladesh's Right to Information Act offers the people, the governed a tool to access information needed to ascertain whether those who govern are in fact advancing the best interests of the governed.

The Right to Information Act is an important step in ensuring transparency and accountability in Bangladesh's democracy. It is a tool for everyone ... the media, civil

society, lawyers, researchers, teachers, general citizens ... to access information from government. And the Right to Information Act gives government the opportunity to be open and free and accessible to those whom it serves by responding freely and expeditiously to information requests or by proactively releasing information to the greatest extent possible.

I am pleased that America in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh has helped inform hundreds of government officials, journalists and civil society representatives on how best to use the Right to Information Act to acquire information on possible irregularities in the public procurement process, in various development and poverty alleviation programs, and in many other areas of governance.

I am pleased, too, that the spirit of the Right to Information Act has induced civil society organizations to increase the transparency of their own organizations by institutionalizing proactive disclosure policies.

Also, we are working with the Information Commission to establish a model public institution that practices proactive disclosure to make its organizational policies and affairs more transparent.

As the Right to Information Act matures, as government becomes increasingly responsive to requests from the citizenry for information, and as media, civil society and the citizens individually learn how better to use the Right to Information Act to acquire information, Bangladesh's democracy will take deeper root and become ever stronger.

Indeed, today this workshop provides a rich opportunity for all involved to work together to make the Right to Information Act ever more effective.

As more light is directed into the dark corners of governance, democracy in Bangladesh will become ever more meaningful. This workshop is truly an important step as Bangladesh strengthens its young democracy. I am proud that America is partnering with the government to make this event possible, and I am so pleased to have an opportunity to participate in this event.

Thank you.

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Prepared for delivery

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