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**Remarks by
U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena
Strengthening Earthquake Resilience Program
Equipment Handover Ceremony
Fire Service and Civil Defense Training Center
Mirpur, Dhaka
November 18, 2014**

The Honorable Senior Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Dr. Md. Mozammel Haque Khan

Md. Shahid Ulla Mia, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

Brigadier General Ali Ahmed Khan, Director General, Fire Service and Civil Defense

USAID Bangladesh Mission Director Janina Jaruzelski

Executive Director of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center Shane Wright

And all who appreciate the threat of an earthquake disaster, most especially, you, the wonderful and heroic volunteer first responders

Asalaam ‘malaikum, nameskar, and good morning

I love languages.

I love words ... English ... Bangla ... each has so many words ...

... but there is one word I like most ...

... a simple word, a powerful word ...

... a word that can save so many lives...

... Preparedness ... these are my favorite words...

... Preparedness ... words that can save lives.

I believe in preparedness ... and you are here because you also believe in preparedness.

Bangladesh believes in preparedness.

As Janina said, Bangladesh is prepared for cyclones and tidal surges and horrible floods.

I am proud that during my three years in Bangladesh, America has undertaken to build 130 new cyclone shelters to add to the 550 that America had already built or rebuilt before I arrived in Bangladesh.

Now, Bangladesh wisely focuses on preparing for an earthquake.

Bangladesh is crisscrossed by three fault lines.

Bangladesh has experienced powerful earthquakes in the past; Bangladesh will experience powerful earthquakes in the future.

Preparedness ... preparedness for an earthquake disaster is essential.

The first step in preparedness is to minimize the damage done by an earthquake.

Bangladesh has instituted an excellent building code that meets international seismic standards.

The key is enforcing the building code.

I believe enforcing this code should be a government priority...

All new construction must meet code.

Hospitals, fire departments and other buildings are especially critical.

I hope the government will assess these buildings to determine whether they meet seismic safety standards.

Those buildings that fail to meet these standards must be retrofitted or replaced by new safe structures.

Santiago, Chile is an example of a city that has over several decades has brought its buildings to code by replacing or retrofitting buildings.

As a result damage and casualties were minimal following a massive earthquake that hit the city in recent years.

I hope Dhaka and other Bangladeshi cities will follow this example.

I also hope the government will establish an earthquake-proof disaster response center, where decision makers would gather to direct rescue and recovery efforts.

This center would provide for disaster planning and training, prepositioning of disaster response supplies, and real time monitoring of disaster challenges.

I hope the government will establish such a center soonest.

I know America and other partners of Bangladesh would help make such a center effective.

Preparedness, of course, has another important dimension ... the critical role played by first responders ... the doctors, nurses, fire fighters and civil defense experts.

These professionals are central to responding to an earthquake disaster, and I am pleased that America has helped train them for earthquake disasters.

But, perhaps, most important to saving lives after a major earthquake are you ... you, the volunteer rescuers ...

... you, the tens of thousands of volunteers who are being trained and equipped with search and rescue equipment to safely rescue the victims of an earthquake disaster.

When the shaking stops, you, the generous and courageous volunteers ... you will be the first on the scene at collapsed buildings ... you will be the first to begin to rescue people.

You are the key to saving lives.

I applaud your service.

I am pleased that America is helping to ensure that you have the training and equipment you need to play your critical part in a disaster response.

I thank, too, the Ministries of Home Affairs and Disaster Management and Relief and our friends at the Fire Service and Civil Defense for being great partners in preparing for an earthquake.

The people of Bangladesh owe all of you, most especially, the volunteer rescuers, great gratitude for making Bangladesh better prepared for an earthquake disaster.

I am so pleased that today America is turning over supplies of critical equipment that will enable you to perform your service most effectively and safely.

Thank you.

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**As Prepared for delivery*