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**REMARKS BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
INAUGURAL SESSION
CONFERENCE ON AMERICAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE
BANGLADESH ASSOCIATION FOR AMERICAN STUDIES**

**SPECIAL CONFERENCE ROOM,
NAWAB NABAB ALI CHOWDHURY SENATE BUILDING
DHAKA UNIVERSITY
FEBRUARY 22, 2014**

Dr. AAMS Arefin Siddique, Vice Chancellor, Dhaka University

Dr. Ahmed Abdullah Jamal, President of the Bangladesh Association for American Studies

Good friends from BAAS and iEARN-BD, who are partnering to present this conference

... and everyone who seeks to foster stronger bonds between America and Bangladesh

Asalaamu 'malaikum and good morning

Take a look at these hands ... can you see these hands?

Maybe, you are too far away ... maybe, you can't see the many big calluses and blisters on these hands ... but let me tell you, they are not pretty.

My title is "ambassador," but my job is actually builder ... bridge builder ... builder of bridges ... long, long bridges ... 10,000 mile long bridges ... between America and Bangladesh ... bridges that link the people of America and Bangladesh ... that why these hands are so rough ...

Everywhere I go in Bangladesh ... from Sylhet to Satkhira, from Tetulia to Teknaf ... I build bridges ... bridges of understanding, as I bring America to the people of Bangladesh and as I endeavor to learn as much as possible about Bangladesh, so America can better know and understand this wonderful, wonderful country.

You, too, are builders of bridges.

You, too, are developing calluses and blisters like mine as you build your own bridges between America and Bangladesh.

This conference will be so helpful as you undertake to further hone your bridge building skills.

This conference will enable you to add new tools to your toolbox so you can build ever bigger, broader, better bridges between our two countries.

Over the next two days, you will be engaging intensely with master craftsmen and craftswomen ... professors who in most cases have experienced America firsthand through Fulbright or other programs. Your sessions are focused on fascinating aspects of Americana that will help you better understand the complexities of America.

America is often difficult to understand as it is a country of contradictions.

It is a rich country, but some Americans live in poverty.

It is a modern country, yet some Americans continue to live in the 18th century.

It is a country where so many have so much, but continue to want so much more.

It is a country that has made so much progress in redressing racial and gender inequality, but yet so much prejudice and discrimination remain.

It is a deeply religious country with strong values and traditions, but many are rootless and seem to have lost their values in their pursuit for material riches.

I could go on and on listing the many contradictions that define America. Sometimes I think that regardless of what you say about America, that statement and the exact opposite statement will both be true!

This conference will help you sort through all of these complexities, so when you return to your teaching positions all across Bangladesh, you will be an even better bridge builder. You will better inspire your students to learn more; you will be able to foster their curiosity about a big country far away from here; you can encourage them to go the extra mile by reaching out to America's Corners in Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna and, as of last week, Rajshahi or coming here to the EMK Center or going to the American Center in Baridhara ... so many ways to directly engage with America.

I hope, too, you will encourage your students to consider pursuing their advanced studies in America. Information on qualifications and scholarships is readily available at the American Corners or on line. Your students should also consider participating in Fulbright and other exchange programs.

Yours is a big task ... building bridges is never easy ... but after this conference you will be better prepared than ever to construct large, beautiful bridges linking the people of Bangladesh and America.

I wish you ever success as you undertake that exciting task.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*