

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



## **“Our Common Struggle Against Violent Extremism”**

Under Secretary Sewall

Dhaka University

March 30, 2016

\*\*\*\*\*

Good morning everyone! Thank you Ambassador Bernicat, Vice Chancellor Siddique, and Chairman Haque for the opportunity to join you here at Dhaka University. It is a privilege to visit this renowned institution, which was the beating heart of your people’s struggle for freedom, democracy, and independence. So it is fitting to be here so close to your Independence Day. I understand that there may be a peaceful student protest here this afternoon – what better proof that the University’s tradition of debate and engagement is alive and well? That tradition infuses each new class of activists, entrepreneurs, and scientists. And it is why this campus has played such a pivotal role in your country’s history – a history that each of you will continue writing as you leave this University. Your cohort here, just like your nation, is on the move.

Bangladesh has made enormous strides – accomplishing in decades what took other countries centuries to achieve. You have slashed rates of poverty, closed the gap between boys and girls in primary and secondary education, and improved healthcare for millions across the country. The United States is proud to have partnered with the people of Bangladesh to help them achieve this inspiring success.

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



Bangladesh has led global efforts in confronting collective challenges such as climate change. In recognition of your policy leadership on this issue, the United Nations named Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina a “Champion of the Earth” last September – its highest environmental award. In international security, Bangladesh is exemplary in providing more United Nations peacekeepers than almost *any other nation* on the planet. The United States applauds Bangladesh for its contributions to peace, and we honor those who gave their lives to this cause.

Today, I’ve come to discuss a newer global challenge – preventing the rise of terrorism and violent extremism.

Violent extremists are a not new threat – they have sought to tear down civilization for as long as others have worked to build it. But in the global age – where peoples connect through travel, trade, and technology like never before – the terror threat has evolved in profound ways. As Prime Minister Hasina noted at the United Nations last year, terrorism knows no religion and no boundaries.

As we have seen in the rise of the so-called Islamic State, or Daesh, violent extremists now use hash tags, chat rooms, and instant messaging to disseminate their hateful ideologies around the world and twist vulnerable neighbors, friends, and even family members into killers. They also exploit weak governance and local resentments to infect new communities and sow instability and violence across the globe.

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



Just look at what's happening now. Even as Daesh loses ground in Iraq and Syria, we see its followers disperse and resurface in new places like Afghanistan and Libya. And they continue to inspire terrorist violence far from battlefields in the Middle East as we saw last week in Brussels, and before that, in Istanbul, Paris, the Sinai, and Beirut.

The United States has also been targeted. In April 2013, I was teaching students like you at Harvard when, just across the river, terrorists attacked Boston's annual marathon – killing three and maiming hundreds. And we have witnessed other horrific acts of violence, such as a gunman killing six worshippers at a Sikh temple in the state of Wisconsin, or a radicalized Californian couple murdering 14 of their co-workers at a holiday party. With each attack, violent extremists try to fill our daily lives with terror, hoping that fear will drive us apart and feed our worst impulses.

That's what they've tried to do in Bangladesh, where groups like the JMB have long targeted innocent people in movie theaters, political gatherings, and New Year's celebrations. Just last week, extremists stabbed a man to death in Kurigram, because he converted to a new faith. This follows recent attacks against Shia Muslims, Hindus, and Christians. In the last few years, four bloggers have been murdered in cold blood. Bloggers like Ajivit Roy, who was hacked to death at a book fair right here in Dhaka. These barbaric acts are not just attacks on the Bangladeshi people, but also their long tradition of open debate, religious tolerance, and moderation.

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



In the face of extremist violence, how can societies like ours – diverse, vibrant, and founded in freedom – overcome this threat? Strengthening our intelligence, law enforcement, and militaries remains vital. But the truth is this: confronting terrorist fighters with force alone cannot protect our communities from their poisonous ideologies and the violence they inspire. If we want to meaningfully reduce this danger, we have to not only take on existing threats of extremism, but also prevent the next generation of threat from emerging. And that calls for a much broader and bolder approach.

That approach began to crystallize in February 2015, when President Obama convened the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism, or what we call CVE for short. There, leaders from around the world, including Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister, endorsed a new way of addressing this threat – one that not only took the fight to violent extremists around the world, but also helped prevent people from turning to violent extremism in the first place.

Forcefully discrediting the “pull factors” – the hateful messages, recruitment tactics, and propaganda of violent extremists – is a critical element. But it’s also critical to address the specific, underlying “push factors,” such as alienation, injustice, and intolerance, that can make people vulnerable to these messages in the first place. *Both* are needed to effectively prevent extremist groups from drawing new recruits and spreading to new communities. Around the world, nations are grappling with this challenge.

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



One lesson we have learned is that governments have a role that goes beyond deploying armies and police to protect people from extremist threats. They also need to govern effectively, transparently, and inclusively to limit the grievances that allow violent extremists to infect new communities. The local functionary who demands a bribe just to do their job, the police officer who fails to protect a certain neighborhood or group, the government agency that perpetuates marginalization by never responding to a community's request for more schools or better roads – all of these can make people vulnerable to the false promises of violent extremists. Put simply, when governments do their jobs well, violent extremists struggle to take root.

Government leaders also have a responsibility to speak out in the face of intolerance and bigotry, which left unanswered, enables extremist recruitment. In the United States, when a teacher mistook a Muslim student's science project for a bomb and sent him to the police, President Obama welcomed the student to the White House. People should have no doubt where public officials stand when it comes to bigotry and intolerance against all citizens.

Perhaps the most fundamental point is that a government's counterterrorism policies shouldn't make the problem worse. As U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said at the White House Summit, "time and again we have seen that the most effective recruiting agents for extremists are the very actions taken against them." By that, he meant that when governments use the fight against terrorism to undermine democracy and the rule of law – for example by allowing

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



arbitrary detentions, excessive force, or restrictions on political space – it can actually drive people toward extremism and violence.

While governments have key roles in preventing extremist threats, they cannot do it alone. The “push factors” I mentioned earlier are complex and often local, and tackling them requires a much broader set of actors. Essentially, CVE requires *empowering the people* in this common struggle – religious leaders, women, businesses, researchers, local mayors, and young people like you all – to help do things like reach out to vulnerable youth, rebuild trust and cooperation with local police, or refute hateful ideologies.

But to empower people in this fight, you have to first *include* all of them. Women, for example, have vital but underappreciated roles in countering violent extremism. As mothers and sisters and daughters, women are often the first to detect signs of radicalization in their families. But their contribution goes well beyond that. Women police officers can better detect female suicide bombers; women prison guards can help reach female inmates with counseling to prevent them from radicalizing behind bars; and female legislators and community leaders can ensure that new counterterrorism policies are sensitive to the unique ways that violent extremists recruit and exploit women.

Women are also on the front lines of building more inclusive communities – making it harder for violent extremists to make inroads by exploiting feelings of marginalization. Just yesterday, the

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



United States named Bangladesh's very own Sara Hossein as one of fourteen "International Women of Courage" for her brave work defending the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable in this country.

Young people also have important parts to play, for you are often the most credible messengers to challenge the terrorist propaganda targeting your peers and help pull vulnerable youth back from isolation and anger. I constantly draw inspiration from the amazing young leaders I have seen around the world. Young leaders like Ahmed from Uganda, who was the victim of a terrorist bombing that killed 74 of his fellow citizens. The scene he described was sickening. But where many would have responded to this attack by retreating in shock, or embracing anger, Ahmed launched a forum for young Muslims to partner with local imams to protect youth from terrorist propaganda. That's the sort of leadership and talent we need to unleash around the world – the sort of talent that exists in this audience.

Truly unleashing the people's talent, however, means protecting their *fundamental freedoms* to peacefully speak out, practice their faith or not practice one, and to organize on behalf of their beliefs. These are universal human rights; but they are also sources of resilience against violent extremism.

When people are free to speak without reprisal, they are more likely to raise concerns about the drivers of radicalization in their communities. If they feel they can speak openly – about

## EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



corruption, or abuse by local police forces, or feelings of marginalization – without fear of backlash, they can alert governments to address potential dangers before they grow.

Also, when people can freely raise their voices, they can confront extremist ideology and propaganda with greater independence and authenticity – whether it’s in the newspaper, at a local café, or on Facebook. At a recent conference in Dhaka, for example, a major gathering of Muslim scholars denounced violent extremists as “enemies of Islam” and emphasized that, “ensuring the safety of religious minorities is the duty of the majority community.” Coming from these respected scholars, these words resonate in a way that government-sponsored messages simply can’t.

Alternatively, young Syrians are using humor and satire to expose not only the evil, but also the absurdity, of many of Daesh’s backward practices. When citizens are free to discover authentic ways to confront extremism, they can help make communities more resilient to radicalization and violence.

Local groups are often best positioned to identify what, or who, is causing radicalization in their communities. They know, for example, if someone has returned from overseas and is pushing radical views that run counter to Bangladesh’s tradition of a peaceful and tolerant Islam. They’ll recognize whether kids are becoming more tolerant or less so at the local madrassa. Citizens also know what to do to fix these problems, whether it’s providing counseling to alienated youth or

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



partnering with police to improve security. Citizens know and care about their communities; and governments everywhere should support their CVE efforts.

Yesterday, I had a preview of the work local groups are undertaking to build a safer and more resilient Bangladesh. I met a young man who helped organize a two-week “Stop Violence” campaign through social media, television, and face-to-face conversations with citizens across nine districts in the country. The simple truth is that no government has the reach, the resources, and often the credibility to do this kind of campaign effectively.

Tackling violent extremism isn’t a question of government on the one hand, and people on the other. We need *both hands* – people and government – working in partnership to meet this challenge. In the American city of Columbus, police have partnered with local mosques to help young people develop a sense of identity and purpose, often through simple activities like volunteering in the community or playing on a local sports team. And in New York City, police set up their own cricket league with the communities they serve to strengthen ties through some friendly competition. But rebuilding those ties is not always easy. It takes time, and it takes commitment on the part of both citizens and government; but the result is a safer and more inclusive community for all.

Violent extremists want to sow fear, to divide, and to provoke overreactions that feed the cycle of bloodshed on which they thrive. They see only the lines that separate us and not the profound

# EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS SECTION

TEL: 880-2-55662000

FAX: 880-2-9881677, 9885688

E-MAIL: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov)

WEBSITE: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>



ties that bind us together. For Bangladeshis, that includes a shared legacy of freedom in the face of repression, a culture enriched by its diversity, and a story of amazing progress in the face of great obstacles.

And in the face of violent extremism, I have no doubt that the people of Bangladesh will prevail if they stay true to their deepest traditions – of inclusion, democracy, and trusting in the power of people. Dhaka University will play a key role because the world needs the light of tolerance and understanding, and your mission of education is critical to this effort. And as you face this threat, you all should have no doubt that the United States will face it with you and help all Bangladeshis build the bright, free, and secure future you deserve.

Thank you.

=====