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REMARKS BY U.S. AMBASSADOR MARCIA BERNICAT

DEFENCE SERVICES COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE
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Introduction

Respected Commandant, Chief Instructor, and officers present, *Assalamualaikum* and a very good morning. It has always been for me a privilege to speak with members of the military. Though I am a career diplomat, in my years in the Foreign Service I have almost always taken part in numerous military and security cooperation efforts. It is with great pleasure to address you here at the Bangladesh Defense Services Command and Staff College.

Partnering on Global Issues

Today, I want to talk to you about the sustained and expanding partnership between the United States and Bangladesh – a partnership that encompasses a variety of issues that range from security cooperation and countering violent extremism, to lifting people out of poverty and strengthening democratic institutions. Partners trust and respect each other; they share common goals and values; they communicate openly and often; and they are committed to each other's success. This is the kind of partnership the U.S. has with Bangladesh.

The United States and Bangladesh have longstanding ties that reach back to the formation of this country in 1971. In its short history as an independent country, Bangladesh has made unprecedented strides in health, food security and poverty reduction. The United States is proud to have been Bangladesh's partner in that progress, and we remain committed to the development of Bangladesh. We support a peaceful, stable, secure and democratic Bangladesh that also contributes to regional and global security.

Throughout our shared history, the United States has partnered with Bangladesh to improve its military capabilities and further enable its efforts to foster stability and peace within the region. The United States has regularly provided support to the Bangladeshi Institute of Peace Support Training (BIPSOT) to assist Bangladesh in providing its military and police personnel with training commensurate with its role as the largest contributor to UN Peacekeeping Operations in the world. We collaborated with the First Para Commandos and Border Guard Bangladesh to increase the country's ability to prevent guns, drugs, and terrorists from moving across its borders. In the maritime arena, the United States has helped Bangladesh to build its Navy Special Warfare Diving and Salvage, which brings a unique capability to the Bangladesh military to assist in anti-piracy efforts and emergencies at sea. We also provided the Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard with 25-foot and 38-foot ultra-fast boats, which allow Bangladesh to patrol and secure its vast inland waterways and coastal areas, reducing insurance rates by 40% and decreasing robberies in the Bay of Bengal by an astonishing 70%.

I am especially proud to mention that in May, the United States supplied the Bangladeshi Navy with the second of two American-built cutters, which are now the largest vessels in the Bangladeshi fleet. The first cutter, the Somudra Joy, has already proven instrumental in improving Bangladesh's maritime security and has, beginning with its initial deployment to this country, responded to disasters beyond Bangladesh's own waters. It provided much-needed humanitarian aid to the people of the Philippines following Typhoon Haiyan, assisted with search efforts after the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight 370, and provided relief supplies and potable water to the Maldives after a fire destroyed a principle water desalinization plant.

The cutter is also now playing a key role in guarding against human trafficking. By working together and enhancing the capabilities of the Navy and Coast Guard – the sentinels of the sea – we take the fight to the terrorists. We eagerly await the arrival of the Somudra Avijan to Bangladesh later this year.

Our U.S. troops regularly train together with their Bangladeshi and other international counterparts both here and in the United States – as evidenced here in this room today – to support everything from disaster relief to ensuring global peace and security.

We partner as well on a wide number of programs that improve healthcare in Bangladesh. Our programs support the “Health, Population and Nutrition Sector Development Program,” making basic healthcare more widely available, especially in underserved areas. We also support the

government's national tuberculosis (TB) program, providing financial support and technical assistance to help Bangladesh detect deadly multi drug-resistant tuberculosis within two hours. Our most recent collaboration on health is the Global Health Security Initiative. Four U.S. Government agencies have joined forces with 17 countries in this unique effort -- the Department of Defense, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Centers for Disease Control and the Department of State -- to form an international partnership with like-minded countries to strengthen health preparedness and response globally to threats of biological, chemical, radio-nuclear terrorism and pandemic influenza. Bangladesh, one of the initial 17 countries, was invited to join in recognition of the work it has done in preventing the spread of epidemics.

Fighting the effects of global climate change is another crucial area in which the United States partners with Bangladesh. Rising sea levels could inundate significant land areas and displace millions of people. The U.S. government promotes clean and sustainable development to prevent the potentially devastating impact of global climate change in vulnerable countries such as Bangladesh. And we support the efforts of Bangladesh to broaden multilateral engagement on this important topic. On November 30 the nations of the world will gather at the UN Convention on Climate Change in Paris, perhaps the largest climate conference ever organized. The stakes are high: the aim is to reach, for the first time, a universal, legally binding agreement that will enable us to combat climate change effectively and boost the transition towards resilient, low-carbon societies and economies. We look forward to partnering with Bangladesh and all of your countries to reach the goal of keeping global warming below two degrees Celsius.

It is a point of pride for the team and the U.S. Embassy and I that Bangladesh is included in key Obama administration presidential initiatives such as food security, global health and climate change. The programs in place in Bangladesh in these areas are considered flagship programs worldwide due to their size, quality and results. We are impressed by the progress Bangladesh has made in these areas and the fact it contributes to achieving similar results elsewhere in the world.

Partnering on a Middle-Income Bangladesh

We also continue to be impressed by Bangladesh's sustained economic growth – an extraordinary 6% annually over the past twenty years. Bangladesh's remarkable success in lifting people out of poverty, the giant strides Bangladesh has made in building export capacity, and the industrial and technological innovations taking place here all support Bangladesh's goal to become a middle-income country by 2021. We congratulate Bangladesh on achieving lower-middle-income status,

and are encouraged by this progress. Looking ahead, the U.S. remains committed to partnering with Bangladesh to ensure even more of its citizens benefit from this extraordinary accomplishment, as well as to boost worker safety and worker rights, increase foreign direct investment, and extend Bangladesh's infrastructure and regional connectivity in order to propel it to middle income status.

Bangladesh's thriving garment sector is the engine that is powering the country toward middle-income status. And I'd like to point out that it is women who are the backbone of the RMG sector. As part of our commitment to help build a strong "Brand Bangladesh" that is respected worldwide, we are working with the government, brands, factory owners, and unions to strengthen workers' safety and labor rights, which, in turn, will lead to a stronger industry and increased investment. A lot of progress has been made in the last two years, with the government registering more than 250 new unions, creating a public online database of factories, and training over 100 new labor inspectors. But work remains to be done, as union organizers and leaders still face harassment and even physical violence. We know that empowered workers are good for business, which is why we are supporting factory and community organizing efforts with a new \$5 million program. We also look forward to working with the Ministry of Labor to develop a mechanism to address unfair labor practices in a just and timely manner.

Our business ties go well beyond just clothing. U.S. companies such as GE, Chevron, Coke, and Pepsi have sizable operations here, and we want to bring more U.S. investment to Bangladesh. We know that an improved and fair environment for business, known as a "level playing field" in Bangladesh will benefit Bangladeshi and foreign businesses alike.

We must remember that international investors never consider any one country in a vacuum -- they can choose from any country in any region. They look at stability, the investment climate, rule of law, and logistics. Increased regional connectivity can foster greater investment. The development of economic and people-to-people linkages within South Asia and between South and Southeast Asia has been hindered for decades by poor infrastructure and regulatory barriers as well as political factors. However, there now exists tremendous opportunity to develop these two regions through closer economic ties to support inclusive growth and poverty reduction. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, or BIMSTEC, open its permanent secretariat here in Dhaka, recognizing the critical role Bangladesh plays geographically and economically in the region. The historic visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last month yielded myriad bilateral agreements that will lay the groundwork for cheaper and more reliable energy, better roads and bridges, the increased flow of people and trade, and better use of precious

resources in the region. Bangladesh's strategic location between these two dynamic regions, along with its growing economy, makes it ideally situated to facilitate -- and benefit from -- economic connectivity.

To reiterate, investors will only choose to invest in countries where their businesses will be profitable, where the logistics of doing business are easy and transparent, and where -- above all -- they can expect political stability. The U.S. is committed to helping Bangladesh make progress on all these fronts; we intend to remain a strong business partner for the benefit of both our countries.

Partnering on Countering Violent Extremism

Returning to defense, let me also note with great satisfaction that Bangladesh is a valued security partner that is fighting violent extremism in a troubled part of the world. Bangladesh recognizes the threat of violent extremism and has adopted an active CVE program to combat domestic and transnational terrorist groups. Bangladesh's counterterrorism efforts have made it harder for transnational terrorists to operate here, and the country remains in what the U.S. Department of Defense calls "Phase Zero."

We are working hard with Bangladesh to keep it a "Phase Zero" country. Currently, Bangladesh and the United States partner on a number of programs that erode sympathy and support for violent extremism by strengthening communities. We provide opportunities for young people to increase their civic engagement; we strengthen community policing by training police officers to communicate better and build relationships with students and the public; we help banks to identify risks and emerging trends in terrorist financing; and, in the military, we are supporting Bangladesh's effort to establish a Chaplain Corps to provide professional religious resources, representing all religions, to members of the armed forces.

We commend efforts by the government of Bangladesh, civil society, non-governmental organizations, religious organizations, and all of you -- members of the military -- who are all partnering in this fight against violent extremism. Efforts to reduce poverty, empower communities, strengthen democratic institutions and the rule of law and increase opportunities for young people all contribute to a more secure and peaceful future for Bangladesh and the world.

Partnering on Democratic Development

I mentioned strengthening democratic institutions as a strategy to prevent violent extremism, and I'd like to say a few more words about democratic values. In 1971, Bangladesh was established as a democracy. From a U.S. foreign policy perspective, nurturing the characteristics, rights, and institutions that underpin democracy is valuable in its own right and provides broader benefits to society as well. Pluralistic, democratic systems enable the healthy release of political tension and thus enjoy greater stability. Such stability is a counter against violent extremists and, simultaneously, boosts economic prospects by providing a favorable business climate that helps attract foreign investment. Democratic countries are healthier, richer, better educated and less violent – all qualities that Bangladesh wants for itself. For these reasons, we regularly engage with the Bangladeshi government, opposition and civil society to encourage policies and actions that protect and advance democratic values, including respect for human rights -- including for women and all religions and ethnicities -- the opportunity for civil society and media to flourish, adherence to the rule of law, and space for free and peaceful discussion of political differences, unmarred by violence.

The U.S. government supports assistance to Bangladesh civil society groups that address a variety of these human rights areas, including support for accountable and democratic institutions and fair labor practices. USAID assistance to local government institutions has helped improve their capacity to provide public services more efficiently while increasing their transparency and accountability. We continue to work with our Bangladeshi partners to protect human rights and prevent abuses, reduce domestic violence, and combat human trafficking. In the garment sector, our Embassy team, including USAID, our Labor Attaché and the head of our International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program work with labor organizations, police, government officials, and international buyers to promote democratic labor unions, encourage constructive dialog between manufacturers, unions and the police and help workers advocate for their rights.

Conclusion

Today, I have spoken about the multi-faceted partnership between the United States and Bangladesh. Trust and mutual respect, shared common goals and values, listening and learning from each other, and a commitment to each other's success, is allowing us to achieve so much more than we could alone. As I bring my comments to a close, I want to remind you, as military officers, that you are a part of this partnership, as stewards of peace and security both at home and abroad.

I cannot conclude without giving a special shout-out to the women officers among you! I recently attended an iftar hosted by the Bangladesh Army, and I met some of the growing number of female

military officers in your ranks. I am happy to see several women here today, and I know that your Prime Minister is a passionate advocate for including more women in Bangladesh's military. The world needs gifted leaders – both men and women – to navigate the process of integrating South Asian economies, to advance our joint efforts to counter violent extremism, and to protect human rights and prevent abuses. We need strong leaders who will think critically, solve problems creatively, and seek to work with global partners to the benefit of us all. It's a lot to take on, but I suspect you are up to the task! Thank you all for your service both to Bangladesh and to each of your countries.

Finally, I would like to take a moment to offer my congratulations to the newly appointed leaders of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. I wish them the best of luck as they begin their tenures.

Thank you so much for your time and attention today. I would be happy now to take your questions.

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**As prepared for delivery*

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