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**REMARKS
BY
UNDER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS
WENDY SHERMAN
4TH PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE
DHAKA
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Before I begin my remarks on the Partnership Dialogue, I want to take a moment to express my deepest condolences to all those who have been affected by the earthquake in Nepal, particularly to the families of the victims. I understand that there were injuries and deaths in Bangladesh as well, and I express my condolences to the Bangladeshis who have suffered. We thank the government of Bangladesh for sending aid and medical teams, and we are pleased by the impressive strides Bangladesh has made in disaster management preparedness in order to respond to events such as this earthquake. The U.S. government has also deployed a Disaster Assistance Response team to the region and is providing \$9 million in emergency assistance as we assess the humanitarian needs in cooperation with the government of Nepal.

I would also like to note that World Press Freedom Day is coming up on May 3. The United States values freedom of the press as a key component of democratic governance. Democratic societies are not infallible, but they are accountable, and a free exchange of ideas is the foundation for accountability. When the press can't do its job properly, society suffers. So I would like to say thank you to all of you in this room who represent the press. Your work is essential to the democratic health of your country.

First, I want to thank Foreign Secretary Haque and the Foreign Ministry for the wonderful hospitality they have shown me during my time here. This is my second Partnership Dialogue in Dhaka. I am once again thoroughly impressed by the vibrancy and warmth of the Bangladeshi people.

Secretary Clinton launched the Partnership Dialogue because she recognized the importance of this bilateral relationship. The Dialogue is an official, government-to-government undertaking that reflects the larger relationship between our two countries, a relationship which covers a diverse spectrum of issues and is grounded in our shared common interests. There are plenty of differences between the United States and Bangladesh, but we should remember what unites us: a determination to provide children with nutrition and education; a passion for expanding opportunities for women and girls; a belief in religious and ethnic diversity and

tolerance; and a shared commitment to the never-ending process of perfecting our political institutions.

I recognize that I am here only days after the municipal elections in Dhaka and Chittagong. Our Ambassador here, Marcia Bernicat, and the U.S. Embassy made a number of statements on Tuesday that expressed our views on the elections. . We remain focused on a long-term solution that accommodates all parties and allows the Bangladeshi people the opportunity to participate in politics and peacefully express their views.

Today I'm here to discuss what this dialogue represents: finding ways that two moderate, pluralistic nations can work together to advance common goals in development, trade, security, and regional integration.

We've made a lot of progress on those goals, especially in development, where Bangladesh has made remarkable strides. And we'll continue to stand with the Bangladeshi people and support that progress through President Obama's Global Health, Feed the Future, and Global Climate Change initiatives.

We support Bangladesh's goal of becoming a middle-income country by 2021 – and we are actively partnering with Bangladesh and investing our resources to make it a reality.

Bangladesh's thriving garment sector will be the engine that drives that growth and helps Bangladesh reach that goal. The garment sector can help lift millions more Bangladeshis out of extreme poverty and, as it moves up the value chain, can bring many billions more dollars into Bangladesh's economy. 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 help build respect for workers' safety and labor rights here.

A lot of progress has been made on that front in the last two years: the government has registered more than 250 new unions, created a public online database of factories, and begun training over 100 new labor inspectors, among many other accomplishments.

Much still remains to be done: union organizers and leaders still face harassment and even physical violence. Their work is important to ensuring the sustainability of Bangladesh's garment sector, so we hope that industry and government can work together to end these tactics of intimidation. Through our own experience in labor relations, we've learned that empowered workers are a force for good, which is why we're 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 deal with unfair labor practices in a just and timely manner.

The United States is Bangladesh's largest single-country importer of garments. But our business ties go beyond just clothing. Companies such as Chevron and Coca-Cola are among the many U.S. businesses looking to invest in Bangladesh. We're very supportive of increased investment, and we're confident that a level playing field in Bangladesh will attract even more U.S. businesses.

Expanding the country's investments in women and girls, including by preventing early and forced marriage and encouraging girls' completion of secondary school, will foster broader and more sustainable economic growth. Prime Minister Hasina has been an outspoken champion of empowering women and girls, and we share the view that a country's true strength is determined by how well it incorporates its entire population.

As Bangladesh grows, we applaud its efforts to play a catalyzing role in the region, including through recent agreements to increase trade and connectivity with its neighbors. We are eager to work with you to help raise incomes and livelihoods in Bangladesh by connecting the growing economies of South and Southeast Asia.

Finally, we're also increasing our security cooperation. As by far the largest contributor to UN peacekeeping operations, Bangladesh is already a force for global peace and stability. And with its improving naval capabilities, Bangladesh will become a key maritime security provider in the Bay of Bengal.

In just a few days, we are providing Bangladesh with its second Coast Guard Cutter. Ambassador Bernicat will deliver the ship to Vice Admiral Habib at a ceremony in California on May 6. The last time we gave Bangladesh a cutter, on its voyage from California to Chittagong, it delivered 40 tons of aid to the victims of Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

So you can see just how broad and deep our relationship with Bangladesh is – how it benefits not only the people of Bangladesh and the United States, but the global community. We think Bangladesh really has near-unlimited potential to transform both itself and its region, and we are excited to be your strong partner in reaching that potential.

Thank you.

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