

Statement by Mr. Md. Mustafizur Rahman, Deputy Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN at the Eighth Session of Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals on the “Promoting equality, including social equity, gender equality and women’s empowerment”, New York, 6 February, 2014

Mr. Co-Chair,

My delegation joins others in reaffirming that equality and social equity are essential elements of social cohesion and sustainable development. Sadly, inequality remains very high across nations in many dimensions of human life within and between countries. Within countries, disparity is evident along reach- poor, rural-urban and gender lines. Globally, inequalities manifest in the form of unequal economic opportunities and wealth. This is not a sustainable situation that is fair, equitable and sustainable for the international community.

We agree that the existence of inequalities makes the eradication of extreme poverty and attainment of any development goal particularly challenging. Inequalities should be addressed if the aspirations of the post-2015 development agenda are to be realized. For that to happen, we have to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are distributed fairly and equitably. In this regard, we emphasize on a transformative shift in national development policy, which will focus on creating opportunities for the poor, low-income and the marginalized people. We must introduce social safety nets for these disadvantaged groups in the areas of education, health care, food security, employment, etc. It is undoubtedly a resource intensive exercise. As such, countries with lesser endowment, like LDCs, need to be supported by the donors in undertaking such an inclusive and equitable development policy.

We should not underestimate the international aspect of inequalities that hinders sound and shared prosperity for all nations. We need to put in place a more equitable global system in relation to trade, investment, technology transfer and global governance. The developed countries should complement efforts of developing countries particularly LDCs and Africa through provisions of ODA, debt relief, improved market access and other benefits. As these are cross-cutting issues, consideration of inequalities and social equity should be integrated across different SDGs, such as, poverty, health, education, water and climate change.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality that exist around the world. It plays out across all areas of life in every country, cutting across both the public and the private sphere. Progress on gender equality is fundamental for creating and sustaining peaceful nations, and building inclusive and resilient society. Transformative changes in social norms and public policies are required to overcome deeply entrenched structural issues of gender biases and discrimination that women and girls confront.

Recent decades have seen improvements in some areas, such as in girls’ enrolment in education, thanks to the MDG commitments. However, progress has been uneven within and among countries. Gender differences continue to be evident in economic opportunities and access to and control over land and other productive assets, education and healthcare. While women’s workforce participation have increased in the last two decades, gender gaps in pay and in the quality of jobs still persist. Despite some gains for women in terms of representation in political

life, the representation of women in public decision-making, from national parliaments to local councils remains still very low.

Mr. C-Chair,

Many reports, including the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons, have proposed a stand-alone gender equality and women empowerment goal in the future framework. We look at it positively. In terms of targets, my delegation would suggest to focus on the development aspect of women, since the root causes of many deprivations of women are under-development. Although there is no straight jacket type division between human rights and development, I must state that we can make progress in all areas if equality of opportunity of women can be ensured and women empowerment can be taken as a thrust policy. Indeed, the best way to ensure rightful place of women in society is through empowering them, facilitating their access to resources, education, health care and employment, offering them social protection through extension of social safety nets.

When we talk about women empowerment, we are in fact dealing with entire spectrum of capabilities of women, their involvement in economic activities, role in family and community decision making and participation in political process. We found this approach quite effective in our national context. By just ensuring access of women to credit, facilitating their education and extending health care, we have been able to make significant progress in the empowerment of women in Bangladesh. As a result, there has been higher level of engagement, participation of women in our development process as well as in the governance. No doubt, we have a long way to go. This is also true even for the advanced societies.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Those of us who blame MDGs for its shortcomings in this area are mistaken, in our view. Those who believe SDGs will solve all problems related to gender are again over-optimistic. There are no 'magic bullets' to achieve gender equality. It is a long struggle. What we need is perseverance and focus on some areas of critical importance for improvement. In this respect, we would suggest that gender equality and women empowerment issues be captured not only in one stand alone goal but also imbedded in all other relevant goals to make it truly an inclusive development agenda.

I thank you.