

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 “Conflict prevention, Post-conflict Peacebuilding and Promotion of Durable Peace, Rule of Law and Governance”, New York, 7 February, 2014

Mr. Co-Chair,

Rule of law and good governance are important for sustainable development. Rule of law, which is a necessary condition for good governance, guarantees transparency and accountability of the governments and their responsible conduct of development activities. In that way, these are important enablers of sustainable development. Institutions of rule of law and good governance are needed to be effective, credible, efficient, accountable and democratic to achieve a just, equitable, prosperous and sustainable society for all.

The good thing is, we are not starting from the scratch. It is a fact that no society exist without observing certain degree of rule of law and good governance. There is surely deficit in many countries and there is scope for improvement. However, achievement of perfection in governance is a gradual process, involving changes in mindset, entrenched interests, social and cultural norms. The fundamental tenet of rule of law is accountability. The governments usually do not heed to calls from outside if the people do not demand so from within the society. As one speaker said yesterday, people living in a society should exert their rightful role as citizens, not as mere residents to achieve a high standard of governance. And to behave like responsible citizens, they need development, certain level of literacy, awareness, enlightenment, capability and empowerment. Disempowered people cannot claim rule of law, good governance and human rights. Poverty, underdevelopment, deprivation and marginalization are the main causes of the lack of empowerment of people. In that way, these are necessary pre-conditions, the enablers of rule of law.

Mr. Co-Chair,

Rule of law and governance are too broad to be encapsulated in a goal or some targets. These are cross cutting issues. In our view, rule of law should be the necessary undercurrent of the SDG framework. We should not be too much attached to the abstract notion of rule of law, rather focus on the applied aspect of it. Equality, equity, justice and inclusion are important underpinnings of rule of law. These, we believe, can be and should be integrated in different goals and targets.

On the other hand, it is possible to reflect international aspect of rule of law and good governance in this framework. For example, democratization of the global financial architecture to ensure greater participation of the developing countries in the decision making, establishment of a more open, rules-based and transparent multilateral trading system to make it ‘level playing’ for all nations, development of law abiding global business culture that follows ethical standards and conducts responsibly and an IPR regime that facilitates transfer of technology, etc. may find places under global partnership or means of implementation. Indeed, improvement in this area would have significant encouragement for improvement of rule of law at the national level.

Mr. Co-Chair,

On the issue of conflict prevention, post-conflict peacebuilding and promotion of durable peace, I think the discussion is taking us to far away. We do acknowledge peace is necessary for

sustainable development as conflict impedes growth and destroys economic foundations and precious resources. However, the question can be legitimately asked, will there be any added value in including peace and security into the SDG framework. We agree with those who said that this may not be the right forum, or context to deal with peace and security. Moreover, if one studies the societies where violent conflicts took place, we will see that most of them were impoverished with low per capita income, with little economic opportunities. They had poor literacy. They were suffering from longstanding economic exploitation exclusion and inequalities. They had weak or no social welfare system; there was absence of decent work, particularly for young adults. All these deprivations and grievances led to violent conflicts and war. So, peace and stability can endure in such societies only through economic emancipation, education and employment.

If we expect that the proposed sustainable development agenda is going to resolve all challenges of the contemporary world, maybe we are expecting too much. If we want to make the new agenda a success, we should strive to achieve consensus on a set of limited goals and targets. We have the mandate emanating from Rio Declaration, the fundamental principle of which is the three pillars of sustainable development. The closer we stay to the spirit of Rio, the better would be for our deliberation and decision making.

I thank you.