

Remarks by H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Belal, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Netherlands at the ‘Wageningen Delta Seminar: Water, Climate, Food and Ecosystems in Deltas’

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Inclusive and sustainable development in deltas: Perspective of Bangladesh as the Chair of Delta Coalition

Distinguished discussants,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good afternoon to you all.

At the very outset, I would like to express my profound appreciation to the Wageningen University & Research and Delta Alliance for organizing this seminar. I would like to congratulate both the Wageningen UR and Delta Alliance for their endeavour in sharing and disseminating knowledge on the vulnerabilities in urbanizing deltas and contributing to enhance resilience in deltas worldwide.

All we know that deltas are the most urbanized and urbanizing areas. Some of the world’s largest metropolises are situated in the delta areas and more than half of the world population lives in urbanized areas. Deltas are historically ideal places for urban settlements due to their positions on the crossroads of land, rivers and seas. Development of deltas are thus critically important for a number of reasons - poverty eradication, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, livelihood improvements, economic growth, environmental sustainability, etc.

It is thus paramount to consider inclusive and sustainable development in deltas by reducing vulnerability arising from urbanization combined with natural calamities like floods and cyclones. You would agree with me that four critical areas need urgent and concerted actions in this regard:

First, rapid urbanization in deltas results in the disappearance of the natural land-water transition zones, which are important as buffers during high water levels and droughts. The decrease of the natural resilience capacity of deltas reinforces the sea level rise and other climate change impacts, resulting in increased flood risk, water logging, scarcity of fresh water, salinity, sedimentation, etc.

Second, deltas are generally important centers and transportation hubs of fossil fuel based economies. Thus, urbanizing deltas often contribute to climate change through enhanced greenhouse gas emissions.

Third, today, deltas across the world are confronted with substantial land-use changes. Ports and port-related industries have become a dominating factor in the economic and spatial

development of many delta areas. These growing economic activities in one way or other make substantial impacts on deltas.

Four, the alluvial soils of delta areas are fertile and the delta waters are the nurseries of many species of fish. In the processes of spatial development in such areas, agriculture and fishing seem to be competing with urbanization, industrialization and even with nature conservation.

Distinguished guests,

Let me now focus on situation in Bangladesh. We are the Asia's largest and the world's most populated delta. Many of our population depend on the delta for survival especially for their heavy dependence on agriculture and fishing. However, our delta is vulnerable to sea level rise and other climate change impacts including salinization of soil and water, cyclonic storms, coastal floods and increased flood risk, water logging, scarcity of fresh water, sedimentation, etc. Appropriate management of deltaic Bangladesh is thus overriding for us in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In Bangladesh, we put emphasis on SDG SIX as vindicated through inclusion of our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as a member of the UN High Level Panel on Water (HLPW). In her address at the meeting of the HLPW on 21 September 2016 in New York, she urged the international community to consider water as an integral part of the new development architecture. She emphasized the need for ensuring equitable sharing of trans-boundary water bodies including integrated management of river basins and underscored the necessity of promoting access to water-intensive technologies to effectively address water-related challenges.

With the Netherlands, we have cooperation on inclusive and sustainable delta management. The Netherlands has been supporting Bangladesh in terms of technical assistance on water resources management since 1965. As Bangladesh and the Netherlands are countries of deltaic nature, there exists immense scope of more cooperation between our two countries in the areas of delta management, and other related areas. You may be aware that the Government of the Netherlands has extended their technical support in the development of Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100, which is expected to be finalized soon. During the official visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister to the Netherlands in November 2015, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands assured of extending all cooperation to Bangladesh for implementation of Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100.

I would like to emphasize that the knowledge and services of Wageningen UR and Delta Alliance are vital to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 6 (providing access to clean water and sanitation). While we talk about SDGs, we need to remind ourselves about the challenges of climate change as well specially for inclusive and sustainable development in deltas. I hope that Wageningen UR and Delta Alliance would work on it with renewed vigour and commitment.

It is my pleasure to inform you that as the current Chair of Delta Coalition, Bangladesh is organizing the Dhaka Water Conference on 28-30 July this year. This Water Conference will encompass Delta Coalition Ministerial Conference and a Regional Water Conference, which is expected to be participated by the countries of South Asia, East Asia, Asia Pacific and members of Delta Coalition. The Conference will focus on action oriented activism and momentum on water issues specially 'Delta Financing' and 'Coastal Delta Management' with a view to building resilient future for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before I conclude, allow me to urge Wageningen UR and Delta Alliance to continue more research and discussion towards attaining inclusive and sustainable development in deltas as well as attending challenges of climate change for the very need of peace and development at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Before I conclude, allow me to quote Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. On 16 April 1963, while confined here in a jail in his home country, he wrote a rather long letter to his fellow clergyman. In his letter, he reminded all. I quote:

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Unquote.

So, Ladies and Gentleman, although Bangladesh and the Netherlands are physically apart, but we are bound by, what Dr. King called "in a single garment of destiny". And now this destiny is ever more under threat because of rising inequality and social injustice. With economic inequality at all time high and meaningful progress on climate change and other social and environmental issues embarrassingly paltry. While your farmers here may have the know-how of urgent works of mitigation and adaptation, there are people in our part of the world who could barely handle this. They hardly know how to adapt to longer droughts, torrential rain when it comes, and new pests spreading. How are they going to do this when they have no access to tools and products, no access to finance, and neither the know-how nor the markets?

So, we need students, with a human mind, going across the ocean not merely to increase the value of their company's share, but also to leave lasting impact on the life and living of those marginalized farmers who await their arrival as messianic savior from the vicious trap of their poverty. The fact that they are trapped into poverty is something entirely NOT of their own making. We all share the blame of this soulless capitalist profit-only monolithic drive. So, now likewise new technology and knowledge we want graduates with knowledge as well as with human character.

Once again, I truly appreciate the Wageningen UR and the Delta Alliance for organizing this seminar. I believe it would generate new knowledge and consolidate our existing knowledge towards inclusive and sustainable development in deltas, which is critical for the very livelihood of the people living in the deltas worldwide. Because we all are bound together "*In a Single Garment of Destiny*".

I thank you all.
