



# BANGLADESH

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**Statement by  
H. E. Sheikh Hasina  
Hon'ble Prime Minister  
Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh**

*(Delivered by Mr. Nurul Islam Nahid, MP, Hon Minister of Education)*

**UNESCO Leaders' Forum  
16–18 November 2015  
Paris, France**

**Mr. President of the General Conference  
Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Madam Director General,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

*[On the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, I addressed this august body as the Head of Bangladesh Delegation to the 38<sup>th</sup> General Conference of UNESCO. Today, it was our Hon'ble Prime Minister Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, who was scheduled to address this Leaders' Forum. She could not be here today due to extraordinary circumstances. She regrets her inability to be present in this Forum in person. However, I would like to read out the statement that she would have delivered to this august gathering on her behalf.]*

*First of all, on behalf of the Bangladesh Prime Minister, let me express my deepest condolences to the Government and the people of France for the loss of so many innocent lives due to despicable acts of terror last week. We condemn such acts in strongest possible terms. Terrorists are terrorists, irrespective of their colour, creed or religion, and must have no place in any civilized society. Our government stands ready to work with all governments to fight this global scourge in all its forms and manifestations.]*

Now, Mr. President, let me read out my Prime Minister's address:

It gives me great pleasure to attend this Leaders' Forum. I thank Irina Bokova for inviting me here. As always, I am deeply touched by her warmth and friendship.

For me, personally, UNESCO has a connotation of peace. I came here first in 1999 to receive the UNESCO–Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, during my maiden term as Prime Minister. Last year, I was given UNESCO's "Tree of Peace" for our work in girls' education.

Over four decades ago, the Father of our Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his address to the UN General Assembly said, "Peace represents the deepest aspirations of men and women throughout the world. Peace to endure must be peace based on justice."

Inspired by his vision, Bangladesh steers every year the UN General Assembly Resolution on a "Culture of Peace and Non-violence". We commend UNESCO for making the concept its own, and giving it global relevance.

Today, in a world torn apart by wars and conflicts, we are in the search for lasting peace. We must mobilize the resources we

have to defeat the forces that want to destroy our civilization. We need to build enough resilience within individual minds, within families, and within communities. We must invoke the power of education, culture, science and communication to bring about a fundamental change in our understanding of peace and progress.

Here, we find the enduring value of UNESCO and its call for “New Humanism”. We need a new impetus to promote quality and inclusive education, cultural diversity, and a rational, scientific outlook as critical enablers of sustainable development and human dignity.

**Mr. President,**

My vision for Bangladesh is to become a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed nation by 2041. To realize these visions, we have made education a central pillar of our national development agenda. Our landmark National Education Policy is an outcome of the lessons learnt in working together with UNESCO for achieving “Education For All”.

Through our sustained investment in education, we have attained the MDG targets of nearly 100% enrolment in primary schools, and gender parity in primary and secondary education. This year alone, we have distributed 326.35 million text books

free of cost on the first day of the year. This is perhaps the biggest such undertaking anywhere in the world. Our Government has given stipends to 13.4 million students, with 75% of them girls. We are currently working on reducing drop-out rates, increasing pass rates, and having more girls in higher education.

Our focus now is more on quality education. I remain personally committed to this as a Champion of the UN Secretary General's Global Education First Initiative (GEFI). We are investing in teachers' training, setting up model schools, expanding technical, vocational and ICT-based education, modernizing madrassa curricula, and reforming assessment systems. Our home-grown efforts at achieving total literacy, promoting second chance learning, and creating life-long learning opportunities are being scaled up further.

In Bangladesh, we attach particular importance to girls' education. We consider this to be a must to keep improving our human development scorecards. I see girls' education as the prime investment to make to end child marriage, prevent violence against women, and change mindsets about women's role in society.

We have the empowering tools of ICT to make a sea change in our efforts. Our young boys and girls are growing up to be the

main agents of our “Digital Bangladesh”. We are using ICT to reach quality teaching to remote areas. It is important for our students to get access to new innovations and ideas. I want our children to grow up as truly global citizens.

Along with science, liberal arts, culture and sports are the other fundamental pillars of human civilization. The “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” duly appreciates culture as a driver of sustainable development. The people of Bangladesh turn to their rich cultural heritage in search of their identity and resilient spirit. Our ‘Baul Songs’ and ‘Jamdani’ now belong to the cultural heritage of mankind. We shall continue to work with UNESCO to promote cultural diversity to build bridges across communities and nations.

As a cornerstone to that, our Government remains committed to upholding freedom of expression and speech. In the knowledge and information society we wish to build, we shall continue to foster dialogue, tolerance, fair play, and mutual understanding.

**Mr. President,**

Language is the main vehicle for all human endeavours. Here I wish to recall UNESCO’s seminal contribution to preserving mother tongues and promoting multi-lingual education. UNESCO made a big step forward by declaring our Language

Martyrs' Day on 21st February as the International Mother Language Day.

We are again grateful to this Conference for recognising the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI) in Bangladesh as a UNESCO Category II institution. We wish to build an archive of all living languages in the Institute, and I invite you all to make the best use of it.

On our part, we are introducing education through mother tongues for our different ethnic groups. We have set up institutions to preserve their languages and showcase their cultures.

**Mr. President,**

We see UNESCO's added value in addressing two main challenges facing the international community.

**First,** the threats of terrorism and violent extremism respect no borders. My Government and I have taken a 'zero tolerance' approach to all forms of terrorism and violent extremism. We have made no compromise with our home-grown terrorist outfits. We keep constant vigil on their possible links with any regional or international terrorist networks.

There is much that needs to be done to root out the mindset that turns to violent extremism. Education of the right kind is perhaps our only response to the wrong narratives being fed to our youth by the violent extremists.

**Second**, climate change impact can reverse much of our development gains. Bangladesh remains on the frontline of that threat, but has not surrendered to it. We have taken a number of adaptation measures with our own resources.

UNESCO's work on conserving the bio-spheres has been a wake-up call to the damage being done to our natural resources. The preservation of the world's natural heritage sites and underwater resources remains our shared responsibility.

In less than two weeks from now, in this historic city, the international community has the opportunity to deliver some hope for those affected by climate change. I add my voice to the call for a 'game changing' new deal to save our planet and its people.

**Mr. President,**

The "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" is universal and ambitious. To deliver on those, we must set our ambitions higher for all major partners including UNESCO. There is room



for creativity and innovation. There is also scope for reform and renewal. If we expect UNESCO to do what it does best, we must further invest in building its resources and capacity to do so.

At 70, UNESCO is still a young organisation. It is perhaps one of the best legacies we have from the ashes of the Second World War. With UNESCO on our side, let us join our hands to create a world where - in Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore's words - the "mind is without fear and the head is held high", where "knowledge is free" and "words come out from the depth of truth".

I thank you.

*Joi Bangla. Joi Bangabandhu.  
Bangladesh Chirojibi Hoke.*