

Address by H.E. Sheikh Mohammed Belal, Ambassador of Bangladesh to the Netherlands at the 60th Anniversary Conference of the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education

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**H.E. Mr. Fritz Holzwarth
Rector, a.i., UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education**

**Professor Michael McClain,
Excellencies,**

Distinguished panelists,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to you all.

I would like to congratulate UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education for their very successful endeavor over the last 60 years in imparting knowledge and education on water to more than 15,000 professionals from around 160 countries. I am confident that this is a rare feat of the IHE Delft, which may not be seen anywhere in the world. I consider myself fortunate to have been able to congratulate you, thanking you all, in person, for all that you have been doing for our people.

I, therefore, take the privilege of expressing our appreciation to the UNESCO-IHE for its world class research, providing hydraulic engineering solutions to the Netherlands and also graduate education to a large number of water professionals from almost every corner of the globe, the vast majority from the developing world including Bangladesh.

The fact that IHE- Delft chose to be in the Netherlands is a feat in itself. There is perhaps no other country, which pioneered living below the sea level and in the process turned their challenges into opportunities like the Netherlands' did for centuries. The Netherlands showed to the world how Government, business leaders, academics and civil society must act together. IHE-Delft stands as a huge testimony to that process. You did it, because none of us could solve it alone.

Ladies and gentlemen:

Bangladesh, as a deltaic country and criss-crossed by numerous rivers, has been greatly benefitted from the UNSECO-IHE. Many of our civil and water resources engineers have pursued higher studies in the UNESCO-IHE over the years. They are now contributing to the development of our country through their augmented knowledge and skill acquired from this prestigious institute. I can see few familiar faces from Bangladesh who are here not only to make their own career in water, they are here to make Bangladesh solve its problem with innovation and creativity in a sustainable way.

The UNESCO-IHE has also been actively involved in Bangladesh over the years under different Nuffic-funded projects mainly to enhance organizational capacity on integrated water resource management at different engineering universities of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh and the Netherlands are delta cousins! Bangladesh is 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, unlike the Netherlands, 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. The management and development of water resources in Bangladesh is critically important for a number of reasons - poverty eradication, disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation, livelihood improvements, economic growth and environmental sustainability, etc. Proper management of water resources is thus paramount for us in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The knowledge and services of IHE Delft in human and institutional capacity-building are vital to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 6 (providing access to clean water and sanitation). SDG SIX is definitely ambitious, but it is crucial to the overarching goal of eradicating extreme poverty. 2.4 billion people still lack access to sanitation, non-fulfilment of Goal 6 will compromise achievement of all SDGs.

While we talk about SDGs, we need to remind ourselves about the challenges of climate change as well. As thousands of activists and scientists around the world gathered last week, around the world, to March for Science, people in Bangladesh would like me to convey, on their behalf, as their envoy, that climate change is not an issue for debate or discussion, it is a question of our existence. I am not here to tell you that it is in the U.S. Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, "to promote the progress of science and useful arts", I am here to appeal to you that your research and scientific dedication is all the more required to make their life livable.

Our people may not be aware of the fact that thanks to climate change, seawater is something we're going to have plenty of in the future. Greenland's coastal ice caps which have already passed the point of no return are predicted to increase sea levels by around 3.8 cm (1.5 inches) by 2100, and if the entire Greenland Ice Sheet melts, future generations will be facing oceans up to 7.3 metres (24 feet) higher. But at the same time, clean drinking water is still incredibly hard to come by in many parts of the world - the UN predicts that by 2025, 14 percent of the world's population will encounter water scarcity.

And many of those countries won't be able to afford large-scale desalination plants. This is why, we are hugely encouraged to hear the news like where Researchers in the University of Manchester in the UK have achieved a major turning point in the quest for efficient desalination by announcing the invention of a graphene-oxide membrane that sieves salt right out of seawater. At this stage, the technique is still limited to the lab, but it's a demonstration of how we could one day quickly and easily turn one of our most abundant resources, seawater, into one of our most scarce - clean drinking water. We are aware and immensely grateful to this institution for their life saving research to ameliorate the problem of arsenic poisoning in Bangladesh and hope that, with continued research, there will be time when problem of arsenic poisoning will be a matter for research museum.

From our side, we can assure you of our total support as we ourselves also striving to make solutions like this more sustainable and doable through our quest for implementing the sustainable development goals 2030.

In Bangladesh, likewise all other goals, we put equal, if not more, emphasis on Goal 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, 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. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina added, let me quote:

Quote

Water is life. It is absolutely essential for our survival. --Indeed, we cannot dream of a peaceful and prosperous world without water. But we must not forget that water is a finite resource. If we fail to manage this resource properly, it can cause a lot of human sufferings. Let us all work together for a world where everybody would have equal rights and access to safe water. Unquote.

As Bangladesh and the Netherlands are countries of deltaic nature, there exists immense scope of cooperation between our two countries in the areas of delta management, water resources management and other related areas. I would like to mention here that in this regard, Bangladesh and the Netherlands signed an MOU "Towards Resilient and Sustainable Delta Management for a prosperous Bangladesh" and a "Letter of Intent on Cooperation in the field of Land Reclamation and Accretion in Bangladesh" in June 2015. 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.

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 with a view to building resilient future for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Before I conclude, allow me, once again, to urge the UNESCO-IHE, as you look back to your institution's last sixty years, to continue more discussion' on human terms, more importantly of those people, who are beyond our gaze and senses, as they languish in the slums and shanty's and make forceful contribution towards attaining SDG six as well as attending challenges of climate change for the very need of peace and development at the local, national, regional and global levels.

At the same time, allow me to urge all scientists, students and academics to put their voice together, both in words and deeds, so that governments make decisions based on science and take measures to implement the results of those decisions. There's just so much misinformation, a lot of people just don't know who to believe, they don't know who to trust, and I think it's time for scientists to evolve in one voice to save the mother nature together.

Let me conclude, by quoting Prime Minister Mark Rutte, as he said during UN high level plenary on water " None of us can solve this alone. We need to tackle tomorrow's water challenges today. We have no time to waste!"

Lets work together for a better tomorrow and beyond.

I thank you,