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to the special session of the General Assembly entitled  
“Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for  
the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

### **Promoting Status of Women in Bangladesh: Role of Dhaka Ahsania Mission — Past, Present and Future**

Twenty years have gone by since the world community adopted the Beijing Declaration, in 1995, giving birth to the Platform for Action, with a set of strategies to implement the plan. The Platform was a call to protect and promote human rights of women, to eradicate the burden of poverty, to remove the obstacles to women's participation in public life and decision making, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, to ensure equal access for girl child and women to education and to promote economic autonomy for women, among others. It called upon all governments, Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society Organizations to take steps to remove all obstacles that come into the way of women's emancipation and empowerment.

Like many other World Conferences that produced Declarations, Conventions and Covenants, the Millennium Summit, organized by the United Nations in 2000, also gave birth to a landmark time-bound document — Millennium Development Goals — calling upon all to achieve them by the year 2015.

Bangladesh is a star player in achieving some of the Millennium Development Goals and the Platform for Action. The success is squarely attributed to the initiatives of a number of Non-Governmental Organizations, including Dhaka Ahsania Mission — which is the third largest in the country — contributing meaningfully to the economic, social and cultural development of the country. However, the success is clouded when one looks at the gloomy picture of the ultra-poor, especially the women and girls. Here Bangladesh needs to go a long way before it can claim that “we see the world in the eyes of the women”.

**Situation of Women and Girls in Bangladesh:** According to a recent study, 65 per cent of girls in Bangladesh get married under 18 years of age; of whom 86 per cent are illiterates, 77 per cent complete only primary education and 26 per cent cross secondary level. Twenty per cent of girls get married even before the age of 15. 55.7 per cent of women above 18 years of age are illiterates. 50,000 Ready Made Garment workers, 90 per cent of whom are women, lost jobs in 2013; and around 50 apparel units were shut down (Transparency International Bangladesh reports). 2.2 million youth enter the job market every year. Half of them are unemployed. Women's statistics are much bleaker in this respect. Mohila Parishad (a national women's association) reports that 431 women were raped during the last six months of 2014; and 2208 were abused/tortured. 87.7 per cent of married women are abused in some way or other by their husbands; 64 per cent physically, 36 per cent sexually and 81 per cent mentally.

Keeping in mind the cardinal call of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action — empowerment and emancipation of women and girls from all kinds of shackles — and the post-2015 sustainable development agenda, which needs collaborative efforts of both the government departments and the Non-Governmental Organizations to bring changes in the lives of the women in Bangladesh, Dhaka Ahsania Mission has undertaken a number of creative initiatives (both ongoing and in the pipeline) — a brief description of which are given below — will exemplify how the Mission is contributing meaningfully to ensure a better world and more freedom for the women.

Microfinance programme: Aiming to make the poor, especially women, economically self-reliant, Dhaka Ahsania Mission launched the Microfinance Programme in 1993. It was meant to develop tools of interventions for livelihood which target beneficiaries are able to get access to the world of work. It offers membership to 60,719 individuals (mostly women) of 2786 groups spreading over 212 Unions (local level administrative units). It was intended for food security, micro-entrepreneurship development and employment generation. It also focused on providing demand-driven diversified savings and credit product to its beneficiaries. Apart from giving credit support to a total of 19,392 members, the programme has disbursed funds among 30,424 members of its 2786 groups.

Human Rights and Social Justice: The Mission is promoting human rights and striving to ensure social justice to live a life in harmony and dignity — erasing discrimination and deprivation among human beings. Major issues addressed through this programme include: low social and cultural status of women, widespread domestic violence in different forms, sexual abuse, human trafficking and some other related issues.

A total of 3,500 villages in 23 districts are covered by 13 projects under three clusters; namely, Protection and Participation, Entitlement and Good Governance, Human Trafficking. Platform For Action focused projects are: Stop Child Marriage, Drop-in-centre for Street and Working Children, Safe Motherhood, Children's Education and Community Care, Missing Child Alert, Victim Support Shelter Home, Action to Combat Trafficking in Person, Maternal Young Child Nutrition Security Initiative.

Training and Material Development of the Mission developed 58 different kinds of materials and trained 4031 people in education, teachers' professional development, and gender and policy advocacy. It also helped promote gender equity and preventing violence. Training and Material Development developed four training manuals on gender equity in early childhood development and adolescent forum management.

Steered by the International Labour Organization, a collaborative project "Promoting Gender Equality and Preventing Violence against Women at Workplace" is being implemented by the Mission with United Nations agencies and 11 Ministries of the Government of Bangladesh. The ultimate goal of the project is to ensure a user-friendly working environment, preventing sexual harassment and upgrading the status of women. 198 women were trained under this project.

The Mission also provides technical support to two government institutes for women — Ministry of Women and Children Affairs — under which 515 Training of Teachers completed training to ensure usage of hygienic sanitation at home and school, of whom 117 were women. 10,809 adolescent girls were trained, of whom 98 per cent got employment.

Under Urban Primary Health Care Services Delivery Project, supported by the United Nations Population Fund, 600,000 women were provided training and services about maternal and child health, safe normal delivery and caesarean delivery, post-natal care, antenatal care, neonatal care, adolescent care and services, family planning services, immunization, general health services and health education services.

Rana Plaza Support: Mission volunteers actively took part in rescue operation and post-trauma counselling and rehabilitation programme of Bangladesh's biggest Garment Factory tragedy which claimed hundreds of lives, mostly women.

Haque-Bulu AM Hospital organized a free two-day gynaecology camp at a coastal area where two hundred patients were given treatment.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission runs a project for women and orphans, called Ahsania Mission Mohila and Orphanage, which also runs a shelter home that houses and trains victims of human trafficking and violence who are rescued, referred, repudiated.

The Centre for Abandoned Children and Destitute Women houses a number of women and orphan children and provide them with food and care.

Nogordda, a fashion house of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, is dedicated to rehabilitate and bring about positive change in the lives of poor disadvantaged and rural women. Around 3000 workers are engaged in this project.

Centre for Abandoned Children and Destitute Women is rehabilitating mostly rape victims and women having unwanted pregnancy. They are provided with safe residential facility, food, clothing, medical services, recreation, education for children, safety, protection and vocational training.

Female Drug Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Ahsania Mission IC is providing treatment and counselling to rehabilitate female drug users and HIV/AIDS positives. This is comparatively a recent project.

Publications: Dhaka Ahsania Mission has published more than 80 books, training materials and teachers manuals to help develop the skills, career and status of women in Bangladesh.

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