



UNITED NATIONS

Dhaka, 1 December 2006

Press Statement by Craig Jenness

I would like to thank all the officials and persons who have taken time from their busy schedules to speak with me, including the President and the Chief Advisor, the Advisors of the caretaker government, government officials, political party leaders, the election commissioners, the Chief of Army Staff, PSO of the Armed Forces Division, various civil society leaders, business leaders and others. The Bangladeshi reputation of being gracious hosts is well deserved.

The Secretary-General asked me to come here to underscore his support for elections that take place in a peaceful, credible and transparent environment and enjoy the full confidence of the Bangladeshi people. He also wished me to express his concern regarding the recent acts of political violence that have resulted in the tragic loss of many innocent lives. Violence has no place in a democratic process.

I am not here to mediate but to offer continued support to an important member of the United Nations family. Among other things, Bangladesh is renowned and respected for its contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations throughout the world.

As the Head of the United Nation's Electoral Assistance Division, I have been involved in many elections. Each is different, but there are a number of aspects that are essential to every democratic election. Some of them are:

- A level playing field
- A peaceful environment
- An election commission which is trusted by the electorate and all parties
- Assurances that all eligible voters can cast their ballots freely
- An honest and impartial voting, counting, and tabulation process

All of these points are critical to ensuring public confidence in an election. If elections do not meet these concerns, they run the risk of not being considered credible, either inside or outside the country.

During my discussions, I found general agreement on the need for peaceful, credible and transparent elections and the importance of avoiding violence at all costs. It was widely expressed that whoever wins the election should govern in the best interests of all and that whoever does not win should accept the results and the very important place reserved in all democracies for the opposition.

On the other hand, there is a deep sense of worry that current political disagreements are harming the economy, increasing tensions, and threatening the chances for a credible election. The consistent concern was that Bangladesh's hard earned democratic advances, and even its international reputation, could be affected if the current crisis continues.

The situation is worrying. I believe that these differences can only be resolved through dialogue, as the Secretary-General has urged. The gap in confidence is greater than the divide in substance. I am convinced that the principal political leaders of Bangladesh, who have themselves sacrificed for democracy in the past, will be able to make the necessary compromises again.

Thank you.

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