

Welcome Remarks by Secretary General at BIMSTEC Day Reception - 2018

His Excellency Mr Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali MP, Hon'ble Foreign Minister, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the Chief Guest;

Senior Civil and Military Officials of the Government of Bangladesh

Ambassadors and High Commissioners of the BIMSTEC Member States

Ambassadors/High Commissioners and other members of the Diplomatic community in Dhaka,

Distinguished Members of the Academia, Business, Think tanks, Media, and civil society, Ladies and Gentlemen; Good evening/As-salamu- Alaikum.

01. It is a great honour for me to welcome all of you to this evening's celebration of the 21st Anniversary of BIMSTEC. Although BIMSTEC Day falls on 6th of June, we thought it would be convenient for all of us to celebrate the event at a time when the Ramadan fasting and Eid holidays are over.

02. BIMSTEC started its journey on 6th of June 1997, with the adoption of Bangkok Declaration, as a sub-regional platform with four Member States. Today, BIMSTEC has grown into a regional organization of seven Member States with the broad mandate to promote peace, progress and prosperity of the Bay of Bengal region.

03. BIMSTEC had to wait for 17 years before it could establish its permanent Secretariat in Dhaka on 13 September 2014, the day when the Hon'ble Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, inaugurated this building as the permanent Secretariat of BIMSTEC. The establishment of the permanent

Secretariat has given BIMSTEC its distinct identity, has enhanced BIMSTEC's visibility, and has strengthened its functioning through regular follow up and monitoring of progress made on decisions taken by the Member States. We are indeed grateful to the Government of Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for hosting the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka. We also express our deep appreciation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh for the continued support to the Secretariat.

04. As directed by the BIMSTEC Leaders during the Goa Retreat in October 2016, the Member States and the Secretariat are collectively working towards making BIMSTEC stronger, more effective and result oriented. In order to realize the visions of our leaders, we are going to resume negotiations to conclude BIMSTEC Free Trade Area. We are delighted that the Government of Bangladesh has proposed to host the 21st Meeting of the Trade Negotiation Committee in July this year in Dhaka. We are hopeful that the meeting will help us in fulfilling our long desire to have in place the BIMSTEC FTA. We are ready to sign the MOU on the establishment of BIMSTEC Grid Interconnection to facilitate electricity trade in the region. We are moving ahead to complete BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity Master Plan by the end of this year. The Government of Nepal has proposed to host the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in Kathmandu towards the end of August this year. We are hopeful that this Summit will produce important roadmap to shape the future of BIMSTEC cooperation.

05. With so many initiatives nearing fruition, BIMSTEC is poised to fulfil its role as the bridge between South and South East Asia. I am grateful to the Government of Bangladesh [Hon'ble Foreign Minister in particular] for nominating me to be the Secretary General of this very promising regional organization at this important juncture. And I continue to rely upon your support for the success of this organization during my term as Secretary General. The success of BIMSTEC will in turn be the success of Bangladesh because of its strategic location in the heart of the Bay of Bengal region. I am fully aware of the strong commitment on the part of the leadership of Bangladesh to the BIMSTEC process; and I hope the same also percolates to the working level in the government and to the civil society at large. I am particularly happy to see that apart from the diplomatic community and government officials, many important figures from the civil society, academia, think tanks and media are present here today to demonstrate their support for BIMSTEC.

06. Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen: Thank you all for being here this evening and being part of our celebration. I am also thankful to my Directors and all the staff for their untiring commitment and hard work for organizing this event and also fulfilling their assigned responsibilities in the overall BIMSTEC process. Thank you all.