

Dhaka, 24 November 2015

Joint Press Release

European Union-Bangladesh Joint Commission held in Dhaka

In line with the commitments undertaken by the European Union (EU) and Bangladesh under the 2001 Cooperation Agreement on Partnership and Development, the 7th EU-Bangladesh Joint Commission was held in Dhaka on 11 November 2015.

The discussions were led on the Bangladesh side by Mr Mohammad Mejbahuddin, Senior Secretary, Economic Relations Division, Ministry of Finance, and by Mr Ugo Astuto, Managing Director a.i. for Asia and the Pacific, European External Action Service, on the EU side.

The Joint Commission meeting took place in a cordial and constructive atmosphere aiming at strengthening partnership in the areas of Governance, Human Rights and Migration; Trade and Economic Cooperation; and Development Cooperation.

Both sides strongly condemned the recent murders of two foreign citizens, the attack against a Shia procession in Dhaka and killings of bloggers and publishers. Bangladesh expressed its firm determination to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Both sides recognised the important role of an independent judiciary in upholding democratic principles, protecting human rights and ensuring justice through fair process. They also emphasized the importance of continued effort of the state and non-state actors, including CSOs and the media, in ensuring freedom of expression.

The EU recalled its principled opposition to the death penalty, in all cases and in all circumstances and invited Bangladesh to instate a moratorium on executions as a first step towards abolition. Bangladesh took note of the EU position and mentioned that the issue of the death penalty is part of the legal system and will be dealt with according to existing domestic laws.

Bangladesh highlighted its efforts to eliminate child marriage, violence against children and child labour.

Bangladesh expressed its sincere appreciation to the EU and its Member States for their cooperation in the field of strengthening democratic governance including land reform; education and skill development; health, nutrition and food security. EU effort was complementary to the Government interventions in attaining targets under the MDGs, such as reduction of extreme poverty, maternity and child health, gender parity at primary and secondary education, and under-five mortality rate reduction by 2015. Bangladesh also appreciated the EU specially for enhancing financial cooperation by 70% in 2014-2020 from 2007-2013.

The EU declared its willingness to continue providing support to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) in line with the CHT Peace Accord through involving all relevant stakeholders in order to contribute to the overall socio-economic development in the CHT.

Both sides renewed their joint commitment towards the full implementation of the Sustainability Compact so as to ensure decent working conditions for all.

Bangladesh and the EU agreed to reinforce their partnership and enhance policy dialogue in selected focal sectors in line with the 7th Five-year Plan's main priority of accelerating poverty and inequality reduction.

In the context of the 'National Taskforce on the Implementation of National Strategy on Myanmar Refugees and Undocumented Myanmar Nationals', the EU expressed its willingness to continue providing humanitarian support in Cox's Bazar in line with humanitarian principles. Both sides agreed on the need for maintaining good working conditions of humanitarian and development agencies operating in the region.

Both sides agreed on a number of concrete steps, including:

- Developing dialogue on all aspects of migration management. A first meeting could take place in early 2016;
- Establishing a regular EU-Bangladesh Business Climate Dialogue to address pending market access issues and facilitate European investment;
- Increasing the use of country system to channel development cooperation finance alongside with the Government's commitment to implement a comprehensive Public Finance Management (PFM) reform and to engage in sectoral policy dialogue;
- Jointly identifying opportunities for relevant interventions suitable for soft loans from the European Financial Institutions matched with blending grants through the Asian Investment Facility (AIF) of the EU, including on key environment and climate change resilient infrastructure;
- Working in close cooperation towards the successful achievement of the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) within the targeted timeline;
- Working together towards an ambitious agreement for COP21 in Paris on climate change.

Following the Joint Commission, consultations were held between the EU and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a series of foreign and security policy issues of mutual interest, including regional matters.