

**Statement of Mr. Tofail Ahmed, MP, Hon'ble Commerce Minister,
Government of Bangladesh at high level meeting
on Services Waiver in Geneva on 5 February 2015**

Thank you Chair, for giving me the floor. I fully endorse the views of our coordinator.

Mr. Chair, right now I am a bit emotional and feeling nostalgic.

Let me take the opportunity to mention that I started my journey in WTO negotiations long back in 1996 as Commerce Minister of Bangladesh. I got the opportunity to lead the LDC Group in the first WTO Ministerial Conference held in Singapore in 1996, where we first raised the issue of duty-free & quota-free (DFQF) market access for LDCs. In fact, we had high hopes and expectations from the WTO system. However, we feel frustrated when we see DFQF market access is yet to be provided to us by all developed partners, many of the LDC issues still remained either unresolved or unimplemented and LDCs still remained marginalized in international trade even after 20 years of existence of the WTO.

Mr. Chair, I decided to take the opportunity of coming here to see what our friends offer us in response to our collective requests for getting preferential access under Services Waiver.

Mr. Chair, as you are aware the issue of preferential market access in services is a long-standing one. It is well-recognized fact that LDCs need preferential market access to better integrate them into the multilateral trading system. With this spirit, the GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) contains a specific provision for providing special priority to LDCs in case of services. However, we had to negotiate years after years to develop a mechanism for providing special priority to LDCs. Finally, we ended up with a Waiver Decision in 2011 though the GATS came into force in 1995 along with the WTO. But, the Waiver Decision is not yet operationalized.

Mr. Chair, Bangladesh attaches great importance to trade as an engine of growth and development. We have been trying to benefit from the opportunities evolving in the multilateral trading system for improving our socio-economic

development. As a result, the contribution of trade to our GDP is increasing progressively. Mr. Chair, you will be happy to know that our Government, led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, has set a Vision to make the country a middle income one by 2021, the Golden Jubilee Year of National Independence. By achieving this target, we want to graduate from LDC status and achieve a better socio-economic situation for our people. It was also the dream of our father of Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to make Bangladesh "Sonar Bangla" (Golden Bangladesh), where people will live with peace and prosperity.

Mr. Chair, to achieve our goal of becoming middle-income country by 2021, we need faster growth of economy. We are trying to have faster growth by utilizing trade opportunities evolving in international trade. In fact, we are doing better in trade in goods. One of the reasons of our better performance is DFQF market access we are enjoying in various markets of our friendly countries. However, our trade in services still remains very poor though 50% of our GDP come from services. We have enormous potential in services. Being a home of 160 million people, Bangladesh has a large pool of human resources. We are capable of providing many kinds of services based on our human resources, if proper market access opportunities are provided.

In this background, Mr. Chair, I urge all our trading partners to come up not only with generous offers, but also with open minds to operationalize Services Waiver so that we, LDCs, can accelerate our process of development, process of poverty alleviation, process of ensuring minimum needs of our people. In fact, this will also be a positive step to realize WTO's goals and spirit.

I am looking forward to hear from our partners.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity.