

Mr. Ambassador Abdul Momen – Global Roundtable

N: You've been very busy in the last few months. How has it been? What has the Second Committee been doing in the last few months?

AM: The Second Committee is one of the most important committees, and a very busy committee. And this year it was more so. We have passed 46 resolutions in the last session, and in addition, we organized six special events and two joint events at ECOSOC. Now, why did we do those? One, to create public awareness and also to educate, also to find out how to handle those interests. For example, one special event that was organized was job reach growth. We have seen across the globe, both in developing as well as industrialized countries, although there has been growth, there are not that many jobs being created. Even in the United States, we see a large-scale unemployment, especially among the youth. So you see the question is, even in terms of Tunisia, you name it, in terms of GDP growth rate it was not that bad, but in terms of creation of jobs, it was relatively very poor. Is it because the old models are not working? Is it because of a structural change? Some people argue that earlier you needed ten people for a project and now you only need ten computers and that's it. Two people out and few computers. So we organized a special event as to what should be our focus, how to handle this issue? It was very successful and really educational. Then we also organized, we have seen last couple of years, there has been one after the other economic disasters – the financial crisis, economic crisis, stock market difficulties. When this happens, normally the rich countries come forward with prescriptions and advice, but the last few ones, we did not see the development partners even come up with any confidence. They could not create global confidence, that “this is short-term and we will take care of it.” So we thought that the UN, being a legitimate forum, should take those issues. So therefore what we did, we invited the veteran institutions, like World Bank and IMF, we invited the UNCTAD, everybody got together for a brain-storming session as to how to handle these emergencies, these issues. We did this in November. Now, I said during this last session we passed 46 resolutions. You will be happy to know this is the first time that we had a consensus resolution on the trade issues. Normally for the last 8 or 9 years, always this trade is a very sensitive issue and so you always used to go for a vote. So we were very lucky this time that we had a consensus, even in ICT, we had a consensus. And these are debatable topics. So which shows me that the global commitment to help improve the situation...

N: Could you mention some resolutions that you think are of greatest importance?

AM: You see, the trade issue for example, there is a consensus commitment there, that it all has to work together to help improve the lot of the people. It is believed that the poorer countries, the less developed countries, that their share in the global trade is still very low, and it has to improve. If not from 1% percent, at least double, because their share is only 1% in the global trade, the LDCs. So the consensus is that we have to improve it. Now there are some emerging countries that are doing pretty well, such as India and South Africa, and somehow those countries are not taking any special responsibility as such, as per the development partners, to help share their expertise, expedience and resources with the poorer ones. So there was a consensus that not only are you opening the door of trade for

the development countries, but also for the emerging economies. So there was some sort of consensus, which is really good. This is a way out. We are not asking, the poorer countries are not asking, they are asking for a decent partnership. One way is a freer trade in a decent partnership. This is good news and hopefully this will lead us to a positive conclusion of the Doha Round for everybody. I was pleased with the commitment that the global committee showed.

Bangladesh came up with a new resolution. And the concept is that -- let me go back to the historical perspective. After the Cold War, there was a big euphoria of hope and then we had the 1992 Rio Conference and then we had in 1994 the Cairo Population Conference, 1995 we had the Beijing Women Conference and in 2000 we had the Millennium Development Conference. Now if you look at all those conferences, all those conferences want the wellbeing of humanity as a whole. But in the process of wellbeing, we started accelerating economic development. But it was lopsided, some people missed the train. Still, 1.4 billion people are poverty-stricken who do not come in at 1.25 dollar and cents. In the process of economic development, we created certain environmental disasters. So we see that one way we are doing well, but many people are not onboard. So we are looking to bring them onboard. How? We are looking at the holistic approach. The upcoming Rio+20, that's where the big issue is that we should have sustainable economic development, sustainable social development, sustainable environment, and we should include them in a holistic way, so that everyone is better off. Only one, don't go too much. And you see in the takeover of the NY Stock Exchange, these movements, the basic element of this movement, that it has to be an equitable distribution of things. So Bang came up with a resolution, it is known as People's Empowerment, empowering people. It is the PM of Bangladesh, she has been promoting this idea throughout her political career. She said that if people are empowered, then they can take decisions that will benefit them. How to empower them? She believes one way to empower them is providing them with jobs, good skills, better training. Another is to reduce poverty and hunger. Another is to end all sorts of discrimination. Another is social discrimination. Another is to include the excluded people in the government, allow them to have good participation in the government, guaranteeing them the right to vote. And she believes the right to food, that is another big slogan for her. Then of course she has beliefs that all sorts of terrorism must end because under that people cannot do their jobs as normal human beings, under that fear. Another is providing better education and training to human beings. She said these are all interlinked, if we can do those, then people will be empowered. If people are empowered, they will know how to get jobs and how to have a decent living. That was also passed with consensus, so this was a good sign.

N: Could you tell us a little about the resolution that was spearheaded by the President of the Dominican Republic, Lionel Fernandez?

AM: See that was another good resolution. Over the last few years, there has been an increase in the food and oil prices, largely due to speculative reasons. So the resolution is that we should discourage this speculation and more taxes coming. We should discourage those sort of speculative behaviors and there should be a global standard so that this should be cut. I thought this was very useful because, for countries like Bangladesh, food

crises, if not global crises, are regional or segmental. Look at Africa, they are without food. Nowadays the situation is such that if you do not have enough food, it is difficult import from others because others are not willing to export their products. So this particular resolution hopefully will ensure food security, not only food security, but also food efficiency, and for energy security, and not only security, also energy efficiency. What I mean, let's say that in some countries energy consumption is a few hundred units or few thousand units, vis-à-vis some people, maybe 10 units per year. Those who are using thousands of units, they are basically abusing and wasting resources, so there should be some sort of efficiency.

Same in the case of food. As I understand of the American family, around 1/3 of groceries is generally wasted. This is not efficient. Why cannot 1.4 billion have one million a day. So you see this sort of consciousness is very important because we all are together in this planet earth, because this is a small planet, a small village. We have to think of others too.

N: Was it difficult to pass the resolution

AM: The concept was good, but there is always some people who argue that food insecurity is not a big issue, because some developed partners believe that it is a distribution problem, it is not a big issue. But the speculative part of the price they do not want to buy. So it was a little , but eventually it worked out. Also, the man who was behind this resolution, his name was incorporated in the resolution. This was something new. Never in the last forty years. Never ever in the history of the UN, individual name or country name done has ever been included in the resolution. But this year, we thought he should get the credit. It's fair, you know, someone's who's promoting it, that person should get credit. And we should have this mental sort of mindset. This is how we can grow.

N: Thank you. What would be the next step with that resolution?

AM: They will come up with more details as to how to ensure more food security, energy security. This is another big issue: we want to include food security and energy security in the Rio+20 outcome docket. So those issues will come into that. So, since they are approving in the second committee this in the GA, it will be easier to include in the Rio+20 docket.

N: In other ways, how do you think you work will affect Rio+20.

AM: As you see, as long as we are working on the MDGs, but MDGs will be over 2015. In the area of MDGs, some countries did okay, many countries are outside the parameters, they couldn't catch up with the MDGs. So the Rio+20 will come up with new goals, and my gut feeling is that those will be known as SDGs -- Sustainable Development Goals. And then, these issues -- energy issues, food issues, hopefully will be certain goals. Of course, that depends on the membership. These are the issues we are working on now. We are deliberating, currently we are having dialogue. We will be doing dialogue for the whole of this month and next month, until March. Dialogue is basically trying to understand people's views on it. So far, UN DESA has received around 6000 pages of suggestions from 600+

organizations. Not that many member states, but NGOs. So now we will be discussing those issues that have been raised. Then we will come up with the draft.

N: So what do you think will be the most salient issues at Rio+20, and which ones do you think we will be able to move forward with?

AM: You see, Rio+20 has had three pillars, which have been more or less acceptable to everyone. One is sustainable economic development; second is sustainable social development; and third, sustainable environmental development. And they are saying we should give equal emphasis to all these. And there should be a holistic approach. So these will be there. Now, there will be sustainable environment. Let's say, green economy will be one issue. Some countries are arguing that the future is green economy. We have invented many great green technologies, and there should be a road map for each country to adopt those. So other countries, poorer countries, are saying, yes, we like the concept of green, but there should be a definition of it. It should be comprehensive. It should not be a mechanism just for trading. "I have technology I want to see, so I have a roadmap," not like that. It should be something locally-cased also. The effort of all those technologies should be geared towards reducing poverty because poverty is a big issue, and we so far have failed to eradicate it. Whatever you come up with, but let poverty be the ultimate goal. So it's very interesting to listen to [the debates]. Another thing in the Second Committee that I was really impressed with is young experts. They are coming with very innovative ideas. The debate was so rich and powerful. I was really impressed, these young people are coming up with beautiful arguments, very innovative ways and constructive. That's why we could accept two resolutions, all around consensus. So you can easily see that the new generation is moving more positively. They are ready to make consensus.

N: Let me ask you about another important event. You were the host to the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Bangladesh. It was his first visit after re-election, so it was an honor for Bangladesh. What happened during that visit and how do you think its going to impact Bangladesh and maybe even the UN agenda at the same time?

AM: You see we are very lucky that the Secretary General picked Bangladesh after the re-election, as the number one country to visit, so I was really pleased. He went there with a certain mission. Bangladesh which started as an independent country was widely known as a basket case, a bottomless basket. In the 1970s, all the big economies, including the Secretary of State of the USA, Henry Kissinger, termed it as a bottomless basket, and they were not sure that this country would survive. I remember on those days when I worked for the government, it was so difficult to import any products from any other country because they would ask you to have a 3rd party guarantee. They would ask that you be able to guarantee from another country, that one day you will be able to pay back. So we come from that disaster, a poverty-stricken, famine-stricken country and now it is an economic model. So Ban Ki-moon was surprised that a country with so much overpopulation, how it came to this position. A country with only 75 million people at the time, around 3 million tons of food deficit, and now there is more self-sufficiency in food. Before they produced only 11 million tons of food and now they produce 36 million tons of food even though they lost much of their land because of new urbanization and all. So he wanted to see in person

why this is happening. And even in child mortality, infant mortality, they have reduced the infant mortality rate by 67%. Maternal mortality they have reduced by around 47%.

N: So do you think that anything that the Secretary-General saw in Bangladesh will be applied and used?

AM: Certainly. He looked at the health area, children's and health areas. He went to clinics, rural clinics. The rural clinics that we have, the local people donates land the government provides the medical facilities. So he went there and looked at that the kids and he wanted to know how this was working, and he was very impressed because the death rate has gone down from 600 to only 55 child death rate. He was really impressed with that. He looked at one center, called ICRDDB, it's a Bangladesh Center that produces one little tablet, a saline tablet, it's a locally conceived tablet. It has reduced the death rate due to cholera. And not only in Bangladesh, but across the world, even in Haiti and Somalia they have been using that little tablet. It's very cheap. He went there to see how they did it. It was a miracle. This cholera used to be big, but now the viral diseases are gone. He also looked at the disaster management program. He went there and was very much impressed. I'll give one example of why he was impressed. In 1970 we had a giant cyclone and half a million people died. We had another big cyclone in 1991 and the same velocity, 100,000 people died. We had another cyclone of same velocity and speed in 2007, only 4,000 died. Why did this happen? Because of preparedness. If you come up with a preparedness program, then it can reduce human loss. So even in Somalia, even if those countries come up with preparedness then maybe there will not be so much loss. It is very busy program. He also attended the Climate Vulnerable Forum Event, It was [organized by] the climate-vulnerable countries. They had a big forum and he attended that because they are demanding that climate is a big issue and it should be defended and included in the UNFCCC and South Africa Durban event. So the good news is that after returning from Bangladesh, he has been speaking about the Bangladesh experience in all forums, including the Security Council.

[N. and Ambassador L.]

AM: Thank you very much. You are very right that the Secretary General raised, which I forgot about, this issue of the ICT, telecommunications and internet. It opened with the Prime Minister together, our ICT interconnection in all districts. What Bangladesh did to have good governance -- there are a lot of complaints by people that the government is not sensitive, not responsive, there is corruption -- they don't know what the government is doing. So what the government did was created union information service center. Each of the 4,501 union information centers. In each area there is a place where it is run under PPP. The local office would be run by local people. One man and one female. Gender equalit . Now the government would provide 400 kinds of services. So if I am a pregnant mother and I want to know what kind of medicine or process I should go through, I go through them because there may not be a doctor available. So she would go to that center and ask some guy. An expert would respond that these are the things you have to go through. Or a local activist wants to know if the government has allocated for the roads or the bridge in his locality, how much, who are the contractors? So he asks the question and the expert lets him know that these are the roads this is the area, this much has been allocated, etc. Then

someone, an agriculturalist, he goes and says that in my eggplant farm, they are dying because of some kind of disease, what should I do? So there is an agricultural expert. He may not know how to put this up, he is not an educated person. There will be help. He tells the story to the center and an expert. Or I am a student I want to go to a good school, I don't know which is good school. So I go there and ask what are the good schools, what is the cost?

Another big issue is reducing the corruption. Because in our country, let's say you want a form for a bus certificate. So you go the municipality and the guy will say "Give me ten cents. Form is free, but there's a charge!" Or let's say you go for any government document but [they] will charge you. These are free. So now you go to the center and whatever document you want, you ask the guy and he will print it. So it will reduce corruption.

And then also, whenever you go and buy something, you go through a tender process. Let's say I want tender. I am a big guy. I don't allow other people to submit their tender. My hoodlums will keep them away. Now, you can submit through this little computer anywhere, and the government gets it, so in the process you reduce this hooliganism. So this has interconnected the 4,501. In addition what it did, all the capital headquarters, we have problems there. It is easy to get the central data, but to get the local data, to include that is challenging. UNDP is helping us in that, training people. Because the manpower to run it is also a problem. The other thing we have done, all the medical clinics – government run – have been interconnected. So I go to one clinic, and for some reason or another I could not go, I go to another one, my profile will be there. They have done this. The Secretary General went at the time when we were connecting the headquarters, he inaugurated that. The government has taken a resolution that they want to teach the new generation – because we have a large number of youth – and the government decided that we should give them the technology. So the government is provided laptops. It is making locally assembled computers, distributing to all schools. At the same time, trying to teach them how to use them. So these things, the development of ICT will go along with our goals. We want to be a mid-income country by the year 2021. So these are all coming up in the same way.

[N. closing remarks.]