

## Joint Statement

International Day of the Girl Child 11 October 2019

### “GirlForce: Unscripted and unstoppable”

For this year’s International Day of the Girl, with the theme of GirlForce: Unscripted and unstoppable, we will work together with girls in supporting them to amplify their voices and stand up for their rights. Bangladesh has made significant progress in improving the lives of adolescent girls over the last 20 years. More girls are enrolling in schools and accessing better health care than ever before. The achievement in girls' secondary education has started to transform the social fabric and is providing girls with greater opportunities. Bangladeshi girls are inspiring, innovative and eager to take charge of their own future. They are using the internet and mobile technology to expand their learning opportunities and intensify their voices. 30.7 per cent of girls (aged 15-19) own mobile phones.<sup>1</sup> They are breaking barriers posed by gender stereotypes by becoming involved in outdoor sports, as demonstrated through the recent success of the Bangladeshi Girls’ U-15 football team.

Despite progress, significant challenges exist in many areas. While Bangladesh has done well on the maternal mortality indicator, data shows that adolescent mothers between the ages of 15 and 19 are still twice as likely to die due to pregnancy and childbirth complications as women between the ages of 20 and 24. In education, there are fewer girls, compared to boys, in the higher secondary, post-secondary and tertiary level.<sup>2</sup> Child marriage is a major cause of girls not enrolling in or dropping out of secondary education, with over half of women between the ages of 20 and 24 being married before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and almost one in five marrying before 15. Violence against girls still poses significant challenges for Bangladesh and it has increased alarmingly in the recent times. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 2015, 42.8 per cent married girls (aged 15-19) are victims of physical or sexual violence during their lifetime.

For Bangladesh to reach the goal of upper Middle-Income Country, a strong, healthy, well-educated workforce comprising both young men and women will be required. All Bangladeshi girls must therefore be provided with safe spaces to actively engage in all decisions influencing their lives. Relevant education and training, life skills, access to health care and protection from all types of violence including child marriage are essential for them to make transition to a healthy and productive adult life. Keeping adolescent girls in school until the completion of secondary education is paramount not only for this healthy transition to take place but also to end child marriage in Bangladesh. We will also have to give recognition to the power and potentials of girls, if we are to achieve the ambitious targets of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the international commitments from the Beijing Platform for Action and the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

We know that unlocking the potential of girls is critical in view of the demographic window of opportunity in Bangladesh and will generate substantial benefits not just for the girls themselves, but for their families

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Demographic and Health Survey Bangladesh (2014), 30.7% of girls (age 15-19) and 54.2% of women (age 20-29) own a mobile phone; however, there are significant gaps in the ownership of mobile phone between boys and girls as well as urban and rural areas. The use of internet by girls (age 15-24) is more common among the educated (i.e., those completed secondary or higher education) and the richest: 10.8% of the educated and 10.7% of the richest girls have used internet during the last 12 months (MICS 2012 - 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Overall, only 58% of enrolled children (girls: 51% and boys: 66%) complete the cycle of secondary education. In technical and vocational education, only 24.76% are girls. At the tertiary level 33.94 % are girls and their participation is low in science and technology area.

and communities also. We all stand united in the call to create more opportunities for girls and empower them so that they can reach their full potentials.

