Foreign Minister participates in first-ever ‘Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom’ in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., 26 July 2018:

Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, M.P., participated in the conference on ‘Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom’ held on 25-26 July 2018 in Washington D.C., at the invitation of the US Secretary of State. The US Department of State organized the meeting. The meeting was attended by 80 delegations, mostly led by Ministers. A good number of members of civil society including religious leaders from different countries of the world attended the conference.

The opening session was attended by US Vice President Mike Pence and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The Secretary of State delivered the address of welcome. Vice President Mike Pence in his inaugural speech mentioned that the USA is a nation of faith and religious freedom is a top priority of its foreign policy.

The Foreign Minister, in his remarks, commended the US government for organizing the first-ever ‘Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom’. He said, “We feel that such conference should also be held at regional level. Bangladesh would be ready to host such a regional Ministerial in Dhaka at a suitable time”.

He highlighted some actions that reflect our commitment to maintain the legacy of a democratic, secular, open, inclusive and pluralistic social fabric in Bangladesh. He said that the right to freedom of religion, thought and conscience has been unconditionally guaranteed by our Constitution.

He mentioned that the UN Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief noted in his report in 2015 that “religious pluralism is deeply rooted in Bangladesh and the principle of secularism as laid down in the Constitution provides for a framework which accommodates religious and belief-related pluralism for everyone without discrimination”.

He informed that the government is promoting a narrative for upholding the spirit of religious freedom and tolerance by observing religious festivals together, with a slogan of ‘To each his or her religion, but, festival belongs to all’.

In conclusion, the Foreign Minister said that the unprecedented role played by Bangladesh in sheltering and supporting 1.1 million forcibly displaced Myanmar nationals reflects the truly Samaritan and inclusive nature of Bangladesh. The influx of the Rohingyas from Myanmar is one of the gravest ethno-religious cleansing of recent times. The perpetrators of these heinous crimes must be held accountable.
The Foreign Minister emphasized that the international community needed to continue sustained pressure on Myanmar to ensure the safe, sustainable and dignified return of the Myanmar nationals to a religiously-tolerant and ethnically-inclusive Myanmar. Ambassador Sam Brownback, Chair of the conference, praised Bangladesh for hosting such a huge number of Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, thanked the Foreign Minister for attending the meeting during a lunch hosted by him. The Foreign Minister also thanked the US Secretary of State for inviting him to the ‘Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom’ in Washington, D.C.

During a reception held in honour of the delegates attending the Ministerial, the US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, thanked Bangladesh for generous humanitarian response to the Rohingya crisis. She also thanked Bangladesh for opening its arms and allowing international organizations to support the Rohingyas.

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