Foreign Minister participates in the 2nd Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., 18 July 2019:

Foreign Minister Dr. A.K Abdul Momen, today, attended the 2nd Ministerial meeting on advancing religious freedom hosted by the US Department of State. Delegates from 106 countries with about 40 Foreign Ministers attended the meeting at the invitation of Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State. In his opening speech, Secretary Pompeo reinforced that ensuring religious freedom for all remains the top foreign policy priority of the USA. He thanked all the governments for their participation and called for collective efforts to ensure the freedom of thoughts, freedom of conscience and religion as reflected in the US Constitution. The US Vice President Mike Pence delivered keynote address and expressed happiness with the progress that has been achieved since the last Ministerial in 2018. In his address, he expressed concern on the violation of this very basic right of the Rohingyas in Myanmar. He reiterated that the US Government will stand strong on resolving the Rohingya issue, and also holding the perpetrators in Myanmar accountable for committing the crimes of atrocities against Rohingyas.

Foreign Minister Momen in his speech highlighted the commitment of the government to ensure basic rights of its people. He mentioned that inspired by the call of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Bangladesh has been relentlessly working to maintain the religious rights of all sects of people. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh has upheld religious pluralism and rights of minorities. He elaborated how the government of PM Sheikh Hasina maintained a ‘Zero Tolerance’ approach to any form of violence and discrimination, under any pretext, against religious minorities, and successfully prevented rise of extremist contents in Bangladesh. This has resulted in the unprecedented socio-economic growth of its economy. Besides, non-communalism and peaceful coexistence, PM Hasina also promotes a national slogan ‘Religion unto individual, festivals unto all’, to promote religious tolerance and create a sense of accommodation among religious sects.

Foreign Minister thanked the US government and the international community to extend support to host 1.1 million Rohingyas in Bangladesh. Bangladesh being a land of humanity, has shown generosity at the cost of its own and he called on the international community to increase the pressure on Myanmar to take back these people.

Dr. Momen observed that at times certain media is disseminating hatred and violence against selected religious groups. He called for the media to play a constructive and responsible role in promoting religious freedom, thereby supporting peace and stability.

He reiterated that violence and wars emanate from a mindset of hatred and ignorance. Therefore, in order to have sustainable peace and stability across nations, he called for creating a mindset of tolerance, a mindset of respect for others irrespective of religion, ethnicity, colour and background. He added that to create such a mindset, everyone including religious, social, community, academia, and media leaders must work together in collaboration and partnership. He proposed to host a similar ministerial at regional level in Bangladesh soon.

On the side lines of this conference, in addition to the Foreign Minister of Hungary, Minister Momen met the Foreign Ministers of Iraq, Bahrain, and Malta. He discussed with his counterpart of Hungary about enhancing the mutual bilateral relation through extended cooperation. Foreign Minister Momen offered him to share expertise in Agriculture and Water resources. He requested to invest in harnessing maritime resources in the Bay of Bengal. He also asked to take skilled and semi-skilled work forces from Bangladesh. Dr. Momen thanked him for the 100 scholarship being offered by the Hungarian government. He invited his counterpart to visit Bangladesh with a business delegation. The Hungarian Minister assured him that he would soon look forward to undertake a visit to Bangladesh.