



## World Investment Forum 2014: Investing in Sustainable Development

### IIA Conference - 16 October 2014

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#### **Mr. President, and fellow discussants and delegates Ladies and gentlemen**

At the beginning I offer my heartiest greetings to you all. This World Investment Forum (WIF) is increasingly becoming one of the major global platforms to bring all stakeholders across the table together to discuss on development opportunities of the countries of the world. This Forum is unique in the sense that it provides us with opportunities to know more about the changing realities and build new understanding while pursuing sustainable and inclusive development.

#### **Mr. President,**

We are speaking in this Forum in a context that within next few months the MDG regime will expire. There is spectacular success both at global and country level, but still many MDGs targets are unmet and challenges continue. Nevertheless, the new development regime under Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is in the offing, thanks to the strong leadership and commitment of the United Nations, but until now SDGs are not fully crystallized. In the last UN Conference on Climate Change where a number of challenges and severe criticisms about low commitments of world leaders were heard but yet there were few encouraging things. There are now stronger consensus, and more sincere interactions between stakeholders with more visible actions to address the challenges of climate change. Governments, private sectors, civil society, research and academia, and practitioners all agree that we have to save our planet.

On the other hand there is a strong debate also in place for some years that if the investment agreements are really delivering results and if they are rather constraining the regulatory authority of the governments.

#### **Mr. President,**

Like many countries Bangladesh also thought that investment agreements would be critical in harnessing foreign investments and Bangladesh signed the first agreement in as early as 1980 and also liberalized its economy for the foreign investors with the enactment of the Foreign Private Investment (Promotion and Protection) Act in 1980. We have agreements already with 31 countries and negotiations with a number of countries are underway. While the impact of the agreements is yet to be ascertained, we come across different challenges while negotiating and finalizing the agreements. Therefore, I take the opportunity to share a few major points that we need to consider while dealing with investment agreements in the perspective of sustainable development.

**Mr. President,**

For any discussion on the reforms of the international investment agreements, it is important for us to set the bigger premise of arguments taking into consideration the backdrop highlighted above. So, first and foremost, we don't want investment or development at the cost of our future generations. Thus, the text and conditions of any investment agreement should explicitly be aimed at ensuring **sustainable development**. Though, it is often argued that investment should be the driver of inclusive development, but how this could be done remains as a great challenge, and this is why we need more **engagement and better understanding** between stakeholders in this Forum meeting.

**Mr. President,**

**Public health and climate change** issues in most cases are not explicitly embedded in the texts of the agreements. From our own experience we can say that it is profoundly hard to get the rich countries agreeable to environment and health related clauses. For the greater interest of the world, our goal should be towards promoting '**responsible investment**' that strikes a balance between private gain and public good. Over the years, there is much progress in the legal system of almost all countries and property rights are well protected. Thus, **ISDS issue** requires critical attention in the perspective of democracy, state sovereignty and sustainable development. On the other hand, we should also rely more on the **local legal system** rather than the highly expensive international mechanisms in dispute settlement.

**Mr. President,**

There is no denying that **agricultural land** is rapidly diminishing across the globe. A study suggests between 2000 and 2011, large-scale land deals covered an estimated 203 million hectares of land worldwide, equivalent to over eight times the size of the United Kingdom. **Protecting land** should be another principal motto while making investment as the poor people of the developing countries are major victims of land acquisition in the name of investment and industrialization. Moreover, protecting land is important to ensure **food security** that constitutes a significant element of sustainable and equitable development.

**Mr. President,**

The role of UNCTAD in promoting sustainable development is much appreciated. It's time for UNCTAD to build greater consensus to develop **a common investment agreement framework** to make investment deliver real development and address the skepticisms surrounding investment agreements. The current trade regime under the WTO is excessively complex; a common framework will help the countries that suffer from capacity constraints to benefit from international investments. Our goal should be to help people overcome poverty and achieve decent life. As I told earlier, to sustain and actively participate in the investment regime given its complexity there is an ardent need for **strengthening negotiating capacity** of the developing countries need no further clarification. Therefore, UNCTAD's role to support partner countries to build **a pool of experts** needs to be further promoted and expanded.

**Thank you Mr. President.**