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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

January 08, 2014

Begum Khaleda Zia
Chairperson, Bangladesh Nationalist Party
H#06, R#86,
Gulshan-2, Dhaka-1212
Bangladesh

Dear Madam Zia:

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing political stalemate in Bangladesh and urge you to work with your counterpart to develop a mutually agreed upon path forward for your country. The current political stalemate could destabilize the country and have long-term negative implications for the democratic process and economic prospects for Bangladesh. The people of Bangladesh deserve a durable, transparent and credible political process through which they can choose their future leaders.

I strongly condemn the violence and unrest during the pre-election period and on Election Day. Under no circumstances is violence an acceptable and legitimate expression of political views. The street violence must stop immediately and parties must have political space to peacefully express their views.

Bangladesh is a valued partner of the United States. Bilateral trade between our countries now tops \$6 billion annually, and U.S. companies have made significant long-term investments in Bangladesh. The ongoing political deadlock has had serious economic consequences and will further weaken the confidence of international investors. To end this downward spiral, I strongly urge you to begin negotiations on new elections that are free, fair, peaceful and inclusive.

U.S. relations with the people of Bangladesh have never been stronger and we partner on an increasingly wide array of common interests. But the current political deadlock and the associated violence significantly threaten our common achievements and the potential for continued progress on a range of issues such as counterterrorism, counter-piracy, the mitigation of natural disasters, poverty alleviation and food security.

We are also working together to improve labor conditions in Bangladesh. While some progress has been made on fire and building safety, much more remains to be done and I still have serious concerns regarding the organizing environment for workers. I trust that you share my support for the rights of workers in Bangladesh. During this tenuous period, I urge you to publicly endorse the commitments to worker safety and labor rights embodied in the Generalized System of Preferences Action Plan and work closely with the United States and the international community to empower workers and bolster the confidence of international investors and consumers in Bangladesh's garment sector.

The world is watching Bangladesh. As a strong supporter of our important bilateral relationship, I again urge renewed negotiations that will lead to free, fair, peaceful and inclusive elections and an immediate end to politically motivated violence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a prominent "R" and "M".

Robert Menendez
Chairman