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Press Release

Bangladesh introduces first ever UN resolution on “Global Drowning Prevention.”
25 July proclaimed as World Drowning Prevention Day

New York, 28 April 2021:

The United Nations General Assembly adopted unanimously a historic resolution on drowning prevention today. The Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN, Ambassador Rabab Fatima introduced the first ever one-off UNGA resolution on “Global Drowning Prevention” which acknowledges the ‘silent epidemic’ for the first time in UN’s 75-year history. Co-led by Ireland, the resolution was co-sponsored by a total 81 Member States. The resolution recognizes that drowning affects every nation of the world and provides a framework for action for an effective response to the unacceptably high number of drowning deaths. The resolution further identifies that drowning is a preventable cause of mortality that disproportionately affects children and adolescents within and among nations. A new UN Day for drowning prevention, 25 July, was also proclaimed to promote awareness and encourage national action, as well as share best practices and key solutions to drowning. Bangladesh Permanent Mission to the UN in New York has been working since 2018 to ensure that this global and preventable epidemic secures much-deserved political space internationally.

In introducing the resolution at the plenary of the General Assembly, Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Rabab Fatima stated that “The Government of Bangladesh recognizes the urgency to have a resolution to generate greater political commitment to prevention of drowning and is honoured to lead this effort at the UN”. Ambassador Fatima, in her remarks, stressed, “We have reduced child mortality rates globally, however, if we cannot bring death from drowning to ‘zero’, our success in primary healthcare, and therefore, achievement of SDG 3 will remain unaccomplished”. In view of the fact that 90 percent of drowning deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, with Asia carrying the highest burden, Bangladesh Ambassador observed, “Drowning is not just an injury, it is an inequity”.

Since drowning incidents affect mostly poor families, drowning prevention could also contribute to achieving several other SDGs, including SDG 1 on elimination of poverty, Ambassador Fatima remarked. Referring to number of deaths from drowning, which is around 18000 every year in Bangladesh, Ambassador Fatima mentioned that the Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is working to ensure that no more precious lives are lost to water. It may be mentioned that a cross-governmental taskforce was established on drowning prevention – led by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with representation from 12 departments (including Fire and Civil Defence, Ministries -such as Education, Women and Children’s Affairs, Social Welfare, and Youth and Sports). The task force is working to prepare a ‘National Drowning Reduction Strategy’.

According to the WHO’s latest estimates, drowning is the cause of 235,000 deaths every year. Many countries report drowning as a leading cause of childhood mortality, particularly in children under-5.

Noting the links between drowning and other global frame works related to sustainable development, climate change, and disaster risk reduction, the resolution presents an important opportunity to make progress towards targets within several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In its operative paragraphs, the resolution encourages Member States to, among others, appoint a national focal point for drowning prevention; develop national prevention plan and programmes; enact national laws; create awareness; support international cooperation and promote R&D.

Introducing the resolution on this unrecognized global issue fulfils yet another commitment of Bangladesh to promote social causes at the UN.

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